

I come to you in the name of one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

“Listen to him!”

Listen to Jesus. Listen to the stories. Listen to the teachings. Listen to the parables, the answers, the love, the peace. Listen to him. We are called to listen to Christ, in the gospel we hear today, in the teachings that have been left for us, in the wrestling of faith that the Church has undergone throughout its history. We are called to listen, but do we? Today, as Jesus is transfigured before us on the mountain, we must ask if we are listening to Christ, in this story, in this church, in our faith. Do we truly listen to Christ? Do we recognize what we hear? What do we do with that?

Hopefully we can wrestle with these questions together today and come to some conclusions. But first, I think it is important to pause, rewind the story a beat, and ask why? Why should we listen to Christ? Why does the priest keep harping on the messages that come out of Christ? I mean, I get he's important and the center of our faith and everything, but why listen? why respond? Why all of this?

God calls out in this moment of transfiguration “This is my Son, the beloved.” The literal voice of God calls out in this moment to make a statement, not just about what is happening in the moment, but about the very nature of the next and final prophet, he who carries with him that very same (but also different) voice of God, the Son, the beloved. And still, as if to drive home this point, Elijah and Moses appear with Jesus. These two prophets, leaders, knew and carried with them the voice of God. And here they are, passing that mantle to Jesus, connecting Jesus to the tradition of his people, permanently placing Jesus in that line of prophets that had come before. This is our why. Because God has said it.

Because Jesus is formally welcomed into the great line of prophets alongside Moses and Elijah. Because he is the Son of God, he is the beloved. And, because of this, his words carry more than a little weight.

And we have the response of Peter, dumbfounded, speechless, terrified, recognizing that something reality-shifting has occurred, that he has been privileged to witness an event that he will fail to grasp the words to describe. It is this one line "This is my Son, the beloved, listen to him!" that survives in the consciousness of the witnesses to this event. It is this one line that they insist on including in the new tradition that is to be passed down. It is this one line that shifts, at their very core, the understanding of what they are doing with this man Jesus. They witness the why and they make sure that the why is reinforced and passed on in the tradition that will be to come.

So, that's the why. It's pretty straightforward really. God said so. Seems like a pretty good reason to me.

And, if we know the why, if we accept the why, then we must ask, do we follow through with the commandment in this proclamation, do we listen to him?

Do we truly listen to Christ?

Do we recognize the voice that comes out of him?

Do we recognize the message and the messenger for what they truly are?

Do we recognize what is happening before our very eyes?

Or are we so terrified that we stumble, throw our hands up, grasp at something to ground the experience of the moment, instead of living into it and being fully present in it?

And, if you'll let me ask one more question, what does it even mean to listen to him?

There's a phrase that's found in the Collect for Year A, Proper 28 (which is the Sunday closest to November 16th for those keeping track) that has become a rallying cry in church circles for how we are to approach scripture. The collect reads in part: "Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, **read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them**, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ..." This phrase right in the middle, *read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest*, is ultimately about listening to the scripture, about hearing the words of Christ leap off the page and enter into your heart. They are tangible. We chew on them. We are fed by them as we digest them, wringing every ounce of nutrients out of them. But then what? What do we do with what we digest? What do we do with the fortification we receive in our daily bread of scripture, of Jesus Christ speaking to us from two thousand years ago and right at this moment?

Can we listen without action?

I don't think we can.

We have the message of Christ, we find stories in the gospels, we learn deeply, to our core the teachings, memorize the miracles, recognize the actions that Christ made in his life and the reverberation those actions had in that time and place in history as Paul, as John and James and communities of believers began to spread that message. These first believers reflected upon the life they had witnessed, on the the life they were told about. And we ask, are all of these stories, the scriptures collected and passed down through the tradition simply for own educational purposes, for our own personal edification in learning

about a place and time, in learning about how some people at some point in history have interacted with God?

Or, is all of this, two thousand years of tradition, of theology, of mission and outreach, of church building, cathedral building, is all of this due to something more in the words, in our experience of Christ, right here, right now. These words, these stories, these miracles, healings, exorcisms, parables, challenges, this man Jesus Christ, if we truly listen to him, is he not calling us, and not simply into a lifestyle, but to a movement. He calls us into a set of actions that we must take in interaction with the world all around us.

I was talking with a pastor friend of mine about the lectionary for this week and how I was going to focus on this phrase from the gospel, specifically asking what we are called to do, the action we must do, in listening to Christ, and he said, "Yeah, that's what I call the difference between hearing and listening," to which I said, "I'm stealing that from you."

There really is a difference between hearing and listening. I think that's what the collect is trying to get at with its call to *inwardly digest*. Hearing is passive. We hear many things. To listen is something else entirely. It requires an intentionality. It requires persistence. It requires us to be fully in the moment. And, it requires us to respond. It requires us to move. It requires us to do something, to create an action, to take the fuel we gain as we digest the words and use it to propel us into something.

When we live into this call of action, we live into our call of faith. Our faith is not passive. Our faith is not building dwelling places on the mountaintop when we experience a truly transformational experience of Christ. Sure, we may be dumbfounded by the true nature of Christ that we experience up upon that mountain. We may want to stay in that

moment and worship Christ in that place for the rest of time. But, that's not what we are called to do. That is not what being a Christian is all about. We are called to take this experience on the mountaintop and use it as our fuel, combining it with the more mundane connections to Christ we meet everyday (which if we're being honest, are anything but mundane), meeting Jesus in each of the stories and miracles and healings and words of Christ that play out in front of us every single day, at least, if we're willing to recognize them as such. We can't just hear Christ speaking to us each day, we must listen to what these daily interactions are propelling us towards, the action that we are called to live into, the expression of our Christian identity that we are called to share with the world around us.

"This is my Son, the beloved; listen to him!"

We are responsible for our own experience of faith. Luckily, the directions on how to live into that faith are pretty clear: "listen to him!" Why?, Because "This is my Son, the beloved." That's all we need to know. That's all we should have to hear, to take the words of Christ and allow them to penetrate into us. We take the words of Christ, chew on them, digest them, receive fuel from them, and we use these words to inspire us, to give us strength in our faith and strength in the call to take that faith and do something in this world to draw it closer to Christ. Listen to him and live into your faith.

Amen.