

“I Know That Voice!”

February 15, 2015

God Revealed series – Transfiguration Sunday

Recently, I watched a documentary titled “I Know that Voice!” Its aim was to put a face “to all the voices we know and love.” So voice performers for cartoon characters and commercials told their stories and talked about their craft, and I was fascinated! Many of them have been doing this work for years with incredible success, and they mentioned the work that goes into making sure they’ve got the timing, emotion, and other elements just right. I hadn’t realized how important that is and what a difference it makes for us as the audience!

And I keep thinking about this scene from Mark’s Gospel today. It all seems larger than life - what they heard and what they saw. It’s a high point, miraculous, incredible moment for Peter, James, and John. We call it Transfiguration. Jesus takes Peter, James, and John to the top of a mountain. Suddenly, Jesus’ appearance changed. He is taken up in a vision. His clothes became blinding white – like when you look at the sun and the glare is so bright that you have to look away.

Moses, the Giver of God’s Law, and Elijah, the last of the great prophets, appear with Jesus, too. Their presence means something. Jesus is the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets, the Messiah, God’s plan for salvation. The disciples receive this special vision of God’s glory. It’s wonderful, but strange, too. Peter wants to stay there and build tents. He’s scared of what’s going on.

And as if the vision isn’t enough, there’s the voice that speaks: “This is my Son, the Beloved...” It might sound familiar. When Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan River, a voice said almost the same words, except this time, the message is for the disciples. Yes, Jesus is God’s Son. But there’s another part of it: “Listen to him!”

One writer says, the Transfiguration “is as strange a scene as there is in the Gospels. Even without the voice from the cloud to explain it, the disciples had no doubt what they were witnessing. It was Jesus of Nazareth all right, the man they’d tramped many a dusty mile with, whose mother and brothers they knew, the one they’d seen as hungry, tired, footsore as the rest of them. But it was also the Messiah, the Christ, in his glory. It was the holiness of the man shining through his humanness, his face so afire with it they were almost blinded.”

The Transfiguration comes in the middle Jesus telling the disciples that he will suffer, die, and be raised again. It happens just after Peter confesses that Jesus is the Christ and just after Peter is rebuked for questioning the need for Jesus to suffer and die for God’s will to be done.

The moment is short. Just long enough to confirm that Jesus is the Son of God. Just long enough to give the disciples a taste of what was to come. Yes, Jesus would be glorified, but not until he faced the cross. From this point on, the controversy surrounding Jesus grows more intense. The religious leaders get fed up with him, and it leads to the cross. To put it simply, things go downhill from here!

From here, Jesus is on the way to Jerusalem where will face death on the cross. So the command for the disciples to listen reinforces what Jesus has been trying to say all along. The journey with him isn't an easy one. And now they will go to Jerusalem.

This mountain-top moment is a pivotal time. It's a moment when heaven and earth meet. Some traditions call it a "thin place." And those moments are powerful! We want to stay there. We want to capture it and keep it. We want to remember those experiences.

The power of this moment and the power of a voice reminded me of those emotional moments that are chronicled and shared on social media. The clip we'll see today comes from the TV show "The Doctors." Dawn lost her sense of hearing as a young adult. The loss was so profound that she didn't have any speech recognition. Hearing aides were not an option. For fifteen years, she communicated by reading lips. It was exhausting for her - not just when she was in large groups of people, but also when she was with her family.

In 2011, doctors told her she might get her hearing back with a cochlear implant. She said she was not afraid of the surgery. But she had another fear. She had never heard her 8-year old son's voice and was afraid that was she expected wouldn't be what she experienced. In her mind she had heard his voice. How would she feel if she couldn't recognize his voice? You have a Kleenex because you might need it as you watch. ****VIDEO****

It's a beautiful moment to witness, and we're encouraged. Our hearts are opened a little wider, our souls are nourished. I wonder how the disciples looked when they saw Jesus in glory and when they heard the voice tell them who he was. How did this short glimpse of Jesus clothed in light on the mountain change them? How did the words they heard spoken so powerfully stay with them?

Something happens on the mountain, and it changes everything. They see Jesus in a way they've never seen him before. They hear the voice of God speaking to them in a way they've never heard before. Even though we know they didn't totally get it, I believe it changed them just like I believe those powerful moments of hearing God's voice or seeing God's work or knowing God's presence or feeling God's grace change us. We are never the same again.

So I hope we let this moment in Jesus' life speak to us. This Transfiguration is more than transformation. Jesus shines in all his glory! And the voice says, "Listen!" Are we listening? If we go back and read the Gospel again, do we get it? Are we ready to follow God's Beloved Son? This God who claims us, calls us, cares about us, teaches us with authority, heals us, and **shines brighter than any darkness we see?**

In a world where we keep on praying for peace and wondering how we pray for those who kill in the name of their religious beliefs, where we struggle to love our neighbor, where we grieve the death of innocent, peace-loving people, where we judge and ignore, where we fall to temptation, where relationships are reduced to fantasy, do we believe that Jesus still shines brighter than any darkness we see? Will we listen to him? Will we follow him?

Do we believe this One who shines in glory? Is his love enough to help us through? I'm with Peter. I want to stay there on that mountain! Coming back down is tough! We can't relive the exact moment of glory. Nothing comes close. It's because those moments live inside of us and give us strength when we need it most. They are once-in-a-lifetime events. To capture them would take away their meaning, but we carry them in our hearts so that our faith can be strengthened. These moments encourage us to keep on going when the road of faith gets tough.

We worship today and encounter the Transfiguration right before the season of Lent. This is a makeover of sorts. Jesus has a different look when the disciples see him on the mountain top. For us, makeover may imply a cosmetic change – a permanent physical change to our bodies. But Jesus' makeover isn't so much physical. It's more that something about him is uncovered. There's something about today that builds us up for Lent. Notice the white and the light! White is color when all of the colors come together – the brilliance of God's creation all in one!

We need the reminder of who Jesus is because Lent is a time when we remind ourselves of our desperate need for Jesus. This Ash Wednesday, we recognize our mortality, confess our sin, and seek God's help in changing our lives all over again. We hear "remember that you are dust, and to dust you will return."

Some people think Lent is a downer, but there's power in admitting who I am before God and starting again with the mindset that I am a sinner who need God's grace. We need that time, but we also need this reminder of the glory of Jesus because that is our hope for our future with God – that we will experience the glory of Jesus at the end of this earthly life. We need to remember who he is as we prepare to focus more strongly on spiritual discipline and on the promise of our baptism: to resist evil and sin.

The disciples have to choose whether to keep on following Jesus – even to the cross. So do we. Everything that Jesus has spoken up until that moment and everything to come is God’s instruction. The call to them in that moment and to us right now is to listen and cling to Jesus’ words – and even more to obey and respond.

Perhaps it’s even to believe again that the light of God’s glory shines still, as we seek to be faithful followers who share the love and hope we know - not in ourselves, but through him. The voice of God speaks still - sometimes loudly, and sometimes so softly, calling us to listen again.

May we listen closely. Thanks be to God. AMEN.