

Listen to Him--Sermon for Transfiguration

The story is told of Franklin Roosevelt, who often endured long receiving lines at the White House. He complained that no one really paid any attention to what was said. One day, during a reception, he decided to try an experiment. To each person who passed down the line and shook his hand, he murmured, "I murdered my grandmother this morning." The guests responded with phrases like, "Marvelous! Keep up the good work. We are proud of you. God bless you, sir." It was not till the end of the line, while greeting the ambassador from Bolivia, that his words were actually heard. Nonplussed, the ambassador leaned over and whispered, "I'm sure she had it coming."

It's not a stretch to suggest that our most important relationships depend on really listening. I think everyone knows the frustration of being ignored when you're trying to say something. Today's Gospel Lesson reminds us that there is Someone in our lives that we dare not ignore; Someone who deserves our full attention; Someone we'd better listen to.

The story of Jesus' appearance changing up there on the mountain can be bewildering to us. It tells us many things: we get a glimpse of Jesus' true glory. There is a glimpse of heaven here, as Moses and Elijah appear, talking with Jesus. The hymns and songs that we sing on this Transfiguration Day put these themes in our mouths. But my attention is drawn to the arrival of Almighty God on that mountaintop. A bright cloud surrounds them, and a voice from the cloud says, "This is my Son, whom I love, with him I am well pleased. Listen to Him!" Now, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased" is the same statement made by the Father when Jesus was baptized. But the voice from the cloud speaks three new words here on the mountaintop. Those are, simply, "Listen to Him!" Listen to Him. Doubtlessly, Peter, James and John were listening for the hammer of judgment to drop; listening for the crackle of lightning and roar of God's thunder. Those men were listening, all right, because their eyes were probably squeezed shut in terror. Then they hear the familiar voice of their Teacher, saying, "Get up. Don't be afraid." When they dare to look up, all they see is Jesus. The cloud is gone. Moses and Elijah are gone. Jesus just looks like Jesus again. Listen to Him. Don't be afraid.

Are you listening to Him? Are you listening to Jesus? Who has your ear? Can you even hear Jesus over the noise of a busy life? Do you create time to listen to Him, shoving other things aside in order to take in his words?

Writer Charles Swindoll once found himself with too many commitments in too few days. He got nervous and tense about it. "I was snapping at my wife and our children, choking down my food at mealtimes, and feeling irritated at those unexpected interruptions through the day," he recalled in his book *Stress Fractures*. "Before long, things around our home started reflecting the patter of my hurry-up style. It was becoming unbearable. "I distinctly remember after supper one evening, the words of our younger daughter, Colleen. She wanted to tell me something important that had happened to her at school that day. She began hurriedly, 'Daddy, I wanna tell you somethin' and I'll tell you really fast.' "Suddenly realizing her frustration, I answered, 'Honey, you can tell me -- and you don't have to tell me really fast. Say it slowly.' "I'll never forget her answer: 'Then listen slowly.'"

When you find a place and a way to “listen slowly” to Jesus—however that works for you—then you will hear the same message he had for his terrified disciples, and it’s exactly what you need to hear, too. “Don’t be afraid.” Those three short words sum up why Jesus came. He came to remove fear by giving himself to you.

To the person running from God, Jesus says: Don’t be afraid. “God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3: 16)

To the person gripped with anxiety about the future, Jesus says: Don’t be afraid. “Do not worry, saying, What shall we eat? Or What shall we drink? Or What shall we wear? For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow...” (Matt. 6: 31–34)

To the person whose sins are killing them, whose guilt is weighing them down, Jesus says: “Don’t be afraid. “Your sins are forgiven. Your faith has saved you. Go in peace.” (Luke 7: 48, 50).

To the person at the edge of burn-out, Jesus says: Don't be afraid. "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:30)

To the person wondering if God notices them, Jesus says: Don't be afraid. "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows." (Matthew 10: 29–31.)

To the person scared to death of death, Jesus says: Don't be afraid. "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die." (John 11: 25–26) "In my Father's house are many rooms...I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. (John 14: 2–3)

To the person terrified at the thought that their life is meaningless, Jesus says: Don't be afraid. "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last." (Matthew 16: 16) "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden...in the same way let your light shine before men that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."

To the person who suspects that their questions and doubts will disqualify them from God's blessing, Jesus says: Don't be afraid. "Whoever comes to me I will never drive away. The will of Him who sent me [is this:] that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day." (John 6: 37–40, paraphrased)

Jesus comes to you with his power and these words: "Don't be afraid." Listen to Him.