

## Title: “Stop and Listen to Him”

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Matthew 17:1-9

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**Lesson:** *We are invited up the mountain with our worries, our stresses, our sins, and our petitions. And Jesus speaks to us, and we listen. And then we come down the mountain and share the love of Christ with the world.*

### Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

This morning’s Gospel reading is commonly titled “The Transfiguration” for obvious reasons. Peter, James, and John ascend a mountain with Jesus and witness his face becoming bright like the sun and his clothing white as light. Because of the significance of this event I spent considerable time researching the topic for today’s message. I simply wanted to get it right. I wanted to ensure that I proclaimed the core message of this passage and so I dug through commentaries, sermons, and other Lutheran resources. Much of what I discovered spoke of mountaintop experiences and fulfillment of Jesus to the Old Testament, and although these are very important messages and worthy of proclamation, what refused to leave my mind was Peter. Let me read that portion of the passage again, starting in verse 1:

And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. <sup>2</sup>And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. <sup>3</sup>And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. <sup>4</sup>And Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.”

Picture this: they are on top of a mountain. In an instant Jesus is transformed and is speaking to two prophets. Probably any other person would know it best to stay quiet and just bear witness to this event, but Peter isn’t just any other person. He interrupts this conversation to ask if he should erect three tents. And then this happens, starting in verse 5:

<sup>5</sup>He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my beloved Son,<sup>[a]</sup> with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.”

Peter was speaking. He was in the middle of his statement when he was interrupted... by God! Let that sink in for a second. And what did God say? He instructs them to listen to his son, to stop talking, stop planning, and just listen. It is as if he was saying, “Peter, your plans are not my plans. Your ways are not my ways. Stop and relinquish control to Jesus.” You see, God wasn’t commanding them to just hear what Christ had to say, they were to follow him, to obey him. They were to set

aside their own agendas and their own plans. They were to respond to what they had just witnessed in the way that Christ wanted them to respond - not in the way that they wanted to. They wanted to stay on the mountain, but Jesus wanted them to go into the world. They wanted to serve the prophets, but Jesus wanted them to serve their neighbors. You see, their plans were self-focused, but God's plans were Jesus focused.

And today, more than 2000 years later, God speaks the same message to us: "Listen to him." Listen to what Jesus speaks into your heart and into your mind. He speaks in many ways: every time you open your Bible and read; he is speaking. Every time you hear the word preached; he is speaking. At every communion and at every baptism, he is speaking. And he is speaking to you. Can you hear him? What is he saying?

In today's reading the apostles were on a mountain; it was as if Jesus pulled them away from the world out of the day-to-day so that they could be closer to God. So that the distractions of their daily lives were eliminated, if only for a moment. And we are invited up the mountain where we can be separated from the distractions of our own lives; where we can be pulled closer to God. Our mountaintop is time in the bible and our time in worship. And it may be in the early hours of the morning or in late hours of the night. It might be at church or it might be at home. Whenever it is, and wherever it is, what it is, is our daily climb up our proverbial mountain where we can stop and listen to Jesus. Though we don't carry our distractions up the mountain, we do carry our stresses, our sins, our worries, and our petitions; those we don't leave behind. Nor should we because they are who we are, they are the crosses that we bear in our daily lives. And as we lay these at his feet, Jesus comes and rests his hand upon our shoulders us just like he did with the disciples. And he speaks the same words to us. He says, "Rise and have no fear. I know the pain that you are going through. I know the worry that you have about your loved one. I hear you when you call out to me desperate for answers, desperate for direction. I know how hard it is for you to ask that my will be done instead of yours. Remember when I was in the garden, before I was crucified, I prayed too that the cup would pass me by, but I also prayed that my Father's will be done. So, I know it's hard. And I stand here beside you and tell you to listen to me: rise and have no fear." And he reminds us that the marks in his hands and his feet, the piercing in his side, was done for us. The suffering and death that he experienced was because of his love for us. You see, that is our mountaintop experience. It's our time with Jesus where he leans into us and says "Rise. I am with you. I am your rock and your salvation. Have no fear."

And upon this mountain, supported by the death and resurrection of Christ, surrounded by the love of our Father, we cry out to him. All our pain, all our sorrows, all our shame is placed before him. Our hands empty, our soul crushed, we have nothing to offer, nothing to give. And in that moment, he embraces us, picks us up, and affirms that we are forgiven, that we are loved, that we are God's child. And then he comforts and encourages us. He tells us that through him we have nothing to fear, nothing to worry. That through him, we find peace.

This is what he says to us on our mountain, but just like the disciples, we can't stay there permanently; we too must journey down and into the world. But instead of the worries, sin, and petitions that we carried up with us, what we come down with is forgiveness, and peace, and faith. We walk down the mountain and into the world with Jesus still by our side, still speaking to us. And we listen to him. And he tells us to go love our neighbor. Be his hands and his feet and serve them

in his name. He tells us to walk beside them in their own struggles, in their own worries, and bring the peace of Christ that surpasses all understanding. Be his voice in their silence, his light in their darkness. To bring the love of Jesus to them. To speak to them the Gospel and to lead them up the mountain so that they, too can experience all that Christ has for them. This is what Jesus tells us today. Will you listen to him?

Please pray with me.

Lord,

Today I climb the mountain with a sack full of stress, shame, and sin. And I lay it all at your feet. Take it from me and exchange it for peace, and forgiveness, and comfort. Lord be with me and sustain in me faith to come down from the mountain and proclaim your message of salvation to all the world. Build in me the courage to bring others up the mountain so that they too can experience your love and forgiveness of their sins and have life everlasting.

In your name we pray. Amen.