Psalm 89:12-18, Mark 9:2-8

“Listen to him!”

 How are you feeling First Presbyterian? I know that in Matthew 6:16 it tells us that when we fast we shouldn’t look dismal and so no complaining allowed. I do hope it has been a significant time for you already and that as we take communion and break our fast together God’s presence will be very powerfully felt. Today, we celebrate Transfiguration Sunday and if you don’t know what that is, don’t worry, you will in just a few moments.

 But it is also a few days away from our Lenten journey that begins this Wednesday evening at 7pm as we celebrate Ash Wednesday together. Lent is such a reminder to us of how important it is to listen to God’s voice and direction in our lives.

 I began pre-marital counseling this past week. It really is one of my favorite aspects of what I do as a pastor. I get to try to shape and form a relationship between two people who love each other based Christian principles that come out of Scripture. But you can guess what the primary skill is for a marriage, or for any relationship. The art of listening. And this is true for all aspects of our relationships. Do we listen to our spouses, do we listen to our kids, do we listen to each other?

 This Sunday in our Scripture we find the command from our Father: Listen to Him. It is directed to us in regards to listening to Jesus our Savior. What a simple command, but one that we often miss as we go through our life. Let’s see how we can do it better this communion Sunday as we celebrate one of the most powerful messages we have receive from God in the bread and juice if we would just listen to him.

 **READ – extended prayer**

A man prayed, and at first he thought that prayer was talking. But he became more and more quiet until in the end he realized that prayer is listening. Sooren Kierkegaard. How did you feel during that long time of quiet? Did you think I had played too hard at the Swarthmore alumni game yesterday and was just starting to feel the effects? Or was I feeling the effects of the fast? That was an attempt to be still and quiet and try to listen to the voice of God in the silence of this sanctuary. We are absolutely not used to it are we?

 You see how listening is not a natural attribute for any of us? In fact you have to work hard to hear someone and to listen to them. Just think of how much that is true when we are talking about God.

 When we hear about the transfiguration of Jesus it relates to this scene in the Bible. I can’t take you there because all it states geographically is that it happened on a mountain. We don’t know which mountain. Jesus goes away from the other disciples and takes with him Peter, James, and John. They tend to be his 3 favorite disciples as he takes them, and only them, to the healing of Jairus’s daughter, here for the Transfiguration, then the Garden of Gethsemane. In fact, James and John were the ones who had that controversial request to Jesus to make them sit on his right hand in chapter 10. It was too much of a request to be granted.

 Then there is Peter. Well, Peter is the star pupil who Jesus has already singled out as a leader. But he’s had a tough week. The “after this” of 9:2 is after Peter rebukes Jesus privately for saying he is going to die in 8:32, then Jesus in front of all the disciples in turn rebukes Peter and says get thee behind me Satan. A bad week for him, but he can bounce back. He is probably giddy that Jesus has once again asked him to accompany him up the mountain and take this journey with him. I’m going to show him what a good disciple I really am, I won’t mess this one up.

 Isn’t that the way we are sometimes? We try to please Jesus, but when we fail we ask for God’s help and say okay, I’m going to get it right this time. Maybe you’re here today as an attempt to get it right. Welcome, we are all in that same boat.

 Well, chapter 9 talks about the transfiguration so matter of factly that it is hard to be able to see the greatness of this event. As they go up the mountain Jesus’ clothes become dazzling white, so white they were hard to look at directly. Then Elijah and Moses appear next to him. It is an absolutely terrifying event on a number of levels.

 Elijah and Moses appearing takes us to Malachi 4:4-6 the last verses of the Old Testament. Here the prophet talks about Moses and Elijah coming back on the Day of the Lord. So their presence and Jesus’ presence means that what is happening is right there in front of the disciples is that the Day of the Lord has arrived. Jesus is indeed the Messiah, the one we were waiting for who would save all of humanity. That is scary stuff, but it is exciting if you let god do the leading, if you allow yourself to listen to God as he directs and leads us all.

 But Peter, not wanting to miss an opportunity to show his prowess says: Wow, Jesus, good thing for you that I’m here. Now we can build a dwelling for each of you. Because remember, if you wanted to worship God there was only one place you could go. The temple, the house of God, where God lived. But hey Jesus, we can put you in a box and we can then visit you and let you out whenever we want and then put you back in the box until we need you again.

 Putting God in a box is a direct result of not listening to him. If we ever get the sense that God is predictable then we have made him into our own image. It tells us that Peter was terrified and didn’t know what to say or what he was doing so instead of listening he spoke.

 But God comes in a cloud and says, listen to him. Listen and don’t accuse. Listen and don’t make false statements. Listen and give the benefit of the doubt instead of assuming malice. You see, Peter, like us, when he is fearful he blurts out and says things and takes actions that are plain dumb.

 When we are fearful or think that our territory is threatened we act out of fear which often translates into someone getting hurt, a spouse, a child, a church member. But God says: listen because I love him. IF for no other reason we are charged to listen because God, our Father, the one in a cloud loves us. God’s response to Peter to listen to him was meant to last a lifetime.

 You know, I can think of no other time that I was able to hear God’s voice more clearly than when we were called to serve here in Strasburg. I say this not as a reflection on me, but rather on what God was able to do in such a clear way. What you don’t know is that during the time of discernment in March we had a day of prayer and fasting. We had done one a few years earlier and God had really moved us in the direction of some pretty exciting things for our medical clinic. This time I was aware of a lot of people in the church who were facing major life transitions, the Bronkemas included, and we just needed some guidance in our personal lives.

 In February I had called and cancelled the interview here in Strasburg but Jim Smith’s persistence and God’s voice and Stacy’s wisdom allowed it to happen. From there the choices that were before us seemed to have been shrouded with a cloud except for this one here. Then in May when we came and Jane Geiger’s innocent suggestion to see the Mayhew home on Sunday afternoon and we had a signed deal scanned from Moscow on Tuesday evening, it all came together so clearly. I attribute that to that day of prayer and fasting where our entire family in a concerted effort listened for the voice of God, and we heard it.

 Today’s day of prayer and fasting matched with communion and then with baptism allows us to strip away all fear and slow things down to be able to hear God’s voice. I know you have so much on your mind. The economy may be getting better but gas prices are killing us and we are still hurting in so many different ways. Listen to Him. Our kids could be a huge concern as they grow up and we really only want the best for them. Listen to Him. The future of this church while exciting still difficult decisions have been made and even more are on the horizon.

 Listen to him, and God will never fail to speak to you clearly if you obey his commands and take this time to do that. Don’t speak out of fear, or act out of ignorance. You know, this is a shorter sermon than usual because I want the sacraments to speak to us in their power that God has given to them. Prepare yourselves now to hear and obey God’s word. Amen.