

Sermon Text for February 23, 2020

By Rev. Charles Gross

Matthew 17:1-9
February 23, 2020

Transfiguration of the Lord

Can you hear me now? <**wonder around with phone**> How bout now? Can you hear me now? Hearing is critical, vital, necessary for life. When you were growing up, did your mom or dad ever address you by your full name? When they stopped using our nickname and switched to our full Christian name, it meant we were in trouble. We had better listen and do what they said. Listen and doing. Hearing and responding. We all know the importance of careful listening, but few of us do it well. You can ask my wife, unfortunately. Listening is hard work. It takes deliberate attention, setting aside your thoughts and preoccupations. It takes focus and concentration. Customer service people, salespeople, counselors, psychologists, psychiatrists are all taught how to listen. Even businesses try to capitalize on the importance of listening. Certainly you've heard that old E F Hutton ad, "When EF Hutton talks, people listen." Even the local Fulton Bank once ran ads on billboards that simply said, "Listening." One very powerful technique used in accurate listening is the '**readback**.' Repeating back what you heard, to make sure you got it right. You might hear that technique used by an excellent secretary when they repeat back your telephone number or email address for accuracy. This technique is also used in aviation between pilots and control towers and radar centers. Welcome to my life over 20 years ago as a C-130 pilot for the Delaware Air National Guard. Let me share one such exchange from the USAF Aerospace Safety Journal, January 1971, called "Hearing but not listening." It's an exchange between an aircraft and an approach control. Please listen very carefully, for the way it's supposed to work is when the approach control gives you an instruction, you read it back to them so they know you received it accurately. Listen to this exchange. *Approach Control*, "Turn right, heading 180 (which means go south). Descend and maintain eight thousand." *Aircraft*: "Right 180 out of fifteen thousand for two thousand." (Aircraft's readback was interrupted by another aircraft and not acknowledged by approach control.) *Aircraft*: "Steady 180 and passing ten thousand for two thousand." *Approach Control*: "Roger." *Approach Control*: "Your position 12 miles southwest of airport, maintain eight thousand feet." *Aircraft*: "Roger, passing nine thousand for two thousand." (This transmission was not acknowledged by approach control.) *Approach Control*: "Your position 19 miles southwest of the airport. Turn right 200 for slight pattern extension. And, that my friends, was the last transmission before the aircraft impacted the mountains. Hearing, but not listening. Saying words to one another, but not acknowledging them, hearing words, but not digesting them, saying words to one another but not making sure you are understood. There is a lot of speaking these days and too little listening.

So, with that brief introduction to listening, let's dig into God's Word. This word is more important than the words of E F Hutton. This word is more important than the Fulton Bank. And, this word is even more important than the radio exchange between a pilot

and an approach controller. This Word holds the keys, to life and death, and to your eternal future. Can you hear me now? Your eternal future. I hope you're listening. So, let me help you hear this word, by addressing just two points: **Why should we listen to Jesus? And, how do we listen to Jesus?**

So, first, why should we listen to Jesus? First, we listen to Jesus because God shakes us. God gets our attention. Notice that Peter, James and John not only see a glimpse of Jesus' majesty and glory, but they also see a powerful family reunion with Moses and Elijah talking with Jesus. This is all well and good, until Peter says, "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." Well, Peter wasn't even done speaking, when God interrupted him with, **<play audio – this is my Son, whom I love, with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!>** Now, I'm not sure if you noticed that nothing is said about Peter, James and John hitting the dirt when they saw Jesus' face shining like the sun and his clothes becoming as white as light. And, they aren't prostrate on the ground when they saw a vision of Jesus, Moses and Elijah having a conversation. But,.... when God, the Almighty Father speaks, they are on their faces! They are flat on the ground. They **HEAR THIS!** So, we listen to Jesus because God the Father tells us to listen to Him.

Secondly, we listen to Jesus because nothing, nothing, nothing is on the same level as Jesus. There is NO equal to Jesus Christ. No equal to Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ stands alone. You can't protect Jesus with a shelter and you can't put Jesus on the same level with anyone else or anything else. Nothing is equal to Jesus. Not your leisure, not your family, not your job, not your wealth, not your bank statement, not your hobbies, nothing in your life is equal to Jesus. So, we must listen to Jesus because the Father tells us to listen to him and because there is no equal to Jesus Christ the Son of God, the Holy, Living Word. So, when God gets our attention, we look up and we only see Jesus. We only see Jesus. Ok, Jesus, now we're listening. We can hear you now. Speak to us. You servants are listening.

Secondly, how do we listen to Jesus? I believe this is our life-long task and privilege. So, let's first notice how Jesus begins to speak. Notice Jesus' mannerisms and attention getting step. Jesus first moves toward the three in the dirt. Jesus touched them. Jesus began with his presence, his touch, his being with his disciples who are in the dirt. Jesus touched Peter, James and John. He first touches and then speaks. We listen to Jesus through his touch. Perhaps through his touch by the Holy Spirit. Perhaps through his touch from a friend. Perhaps his touch through worship, through a prayer, through a song, through a sermon. Perhaps his touch through a dream. We listen to Jesus through his presence and touch in our lives, experienced in many different ways. Then, after touching them, Jesus says, **"Get up. Don't be afraid."** Get up! Don't be afraid. Jesus foreshadows our resurrection. Get up, don't be afraid. The implication is "I am with you!" I'm here for you.... And I always will be. I am with you unto the end of the age. Remember what Jesus said to the dead and buried Lazarus? With a loud voice Jesus said, "Lazarus, Come out!" Lazarus come out! It's like, "Lazarus, Get Up! Don't be afraid." I'm the way, the truth, and the life! Listen to me. So, we listen to Jesus through his touch and through his words of life and hope.

Thirdly and this is easy to miss because it is close to the first method of listening to Jesus. Jesus goes down the mountain with them. Jesus goes down the mountain with them. So, Jesus speaks with his touch, he speaks with powerful words of life, "Get up. Don't be afraid," and he speaks with his constant companionship and perpetual presence. Jesus goes down the mountain with them and Jesus goes down the mountain with us. In fact, he says, from another mountain, "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Jesus goes down the mountain with us, into life. Jesus goes into all the chaos, trouble, difficulty, diseases, cancer, anger, turmoil, upset, worry and anxieties we could ever face. Friends, when we listen to Jesus, we realize that Jesus goes with us into the doctor's office to hear the cancer diagnosis, Jesus goes with us into hospice centers to sit with loved ones wasting away, Jesus goes with us into job interviews where we are turned down, Jesus goes with us into exit interviews when we've been downsized after a lifetime of work, Jesus goes with us into divorce courts, into rehab centers and into our addictions.

Friends, Jesus is speaking into our lives this very moment, "Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest." Come to me! Come to me! Come to me and I will give you rest. He speaks into our existence with, "Don't be afraid." "I am with you." Friends, are we listening? Are we listening to Jesus' words about life? Are we listening to Jesus' words about love?

If we're listening closely to Jesus, let us hear his words to you and to me from another mountain. Let us hear Jesus speak from the mountain shaped like a skull, called Golgotha. On that mountain, Jesus was hoisted up alone for you and for me. He was nailed on that cross and from that mountain said, "Father forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing." Father forgive them. Then he spurted and whispered those words, "It is finished." It is finished. Can you hear your Savior now? Can you hear the one who made you beautiful? Can you hear the one who formed you in His very image? Can you hear the one who forgives you so that you will live? Can you hear him say, your salvation is complete, your hope is sealed, your eternal life is assured? Friends, it is finished. It is finished. Jesus completed the work that we could not do. Are you listening to him?

Our challenge this season, is to listen to Jesus, believe Jesus, trust Jesus, follow Jesus and do what He says. Our challenge is to listen to Jesus and do what He says. Our challenge this season is to listen to Jesus through His Word, listen to Jesus through devotions, listen to Jesus through Bible study, listen to Jesus through small groups, listen to Jesus when we serve, listen to Jesus when we share, listen to Jesus when we give, listen to Jesus when we go on mission, listen to Jesus when we call and listen to Jesus when we visit one another. For, when we listen to Jesus, we too can reach out and touch someone. We too can say, "Get up, I'll help you! We too can say, "Don't be afraid, I'll go with you." Then, O then, the world will look up and see Jesus alone! Amen.