

## Listen to Him!

If you've been out shopping lately, you probably don't need to be reminded that Valentine's Day is just around the corner. It's a day when many of us give cards and gifts, or candy and flowers to those we love most. It's a day for spending time with those we're closest to. We share our deepest thoughts and feelings with one another.

But one guy is concerned about his spouse. He says to his buddy, "You know, my wife talks to herself a lot."

And his friend confides, "Mine does, too, but she doesn't know it. She thinks I'm listening."

Well. If someone who's important in your life has something to tell you, it's good to listen to him or her. But in this electronic age, so many voices echo in your ears in the course of any given week! Many of you carry cell phones with you everywhere you go, so that family members, friends, and co-workers can reach you. Plus there are news broadcasts, talk shows, radio programs, You Tube videos, telemarketers, and of course, an endless stream of commercials—all competing for your attention. All these voices

at the *same time*—all these voices clashing in a cacophony. To which voices do you listen? After a while, it becomes impossible to distinguish one from the other.

And then you come to church and you hear yet another voice: A voice from a cloud. On this Transfiguration Sunday.

On this final Sunday after the Epiphany, we look back at the epiphanies we've been given. Of Jesus at Bethlehem, first seen and worshiped by the light of a star. Of Jesus at the Jordan, rising from the waters of baptism, anointed by God's Spirit, marked by God's love. Of Jesus at Cana, transforming water into wine, his glory just beginning to be revealed. Of Jesus at Nazareth, proclaiming his mission statement.

But today is different. Today Luke shows us a vision of Jesus on a mountain, the appearance of his face transformed, his clothing brighter than a flash of lightning.

Today Luke takes us to a mountaintop. Mountain peak moments are watersheds that divide past from future. Mountain peak moments offer a vantage point from which we get to not only look back, but also to catch glimpses of what lies ahead. This is a pivotal time for us in the church and a pivotal time in the ministry of Jesus.

Now you know what Jesus does at every critical juncture of his ministry. He withdraws to pray. Today we hear that Jesus—with three close companions—climbs a mountain. To what's known as a "thin place," a place where the distance between heaven and earth narrows. Jesus comes to pray. For guidance. For strength to carry out what he has come to do. Just as he will at Gethsemane, Jesus needs this time, this space, this intimacy with his Father.

Like Jesus after whom our lives are patterned, you and I need these times and spaces. In the rushing busy-ness of contemporary life, we need these times and spaces of retreat more than ever. You have a deep-seated need for encounter and relationship with the One who made you. And in covenant relationship, a monologue just doesn't work. Being in relationship means being in conversation. Two-way conversation.

Relationship with the Creator doesn't mean just talking. It's not about me continually saying *I want; I need*. It's not even just about making intercessory requests for the needs and the wants of others. And it's not about just waiting until it's my turn to talk. What might I miss if I'm so focused on speaking that I fail to listen? Authentic communication means quieting myself.

Centering myself. Preparing myself. Opening myself to listen.  
Truly listen.

In order to listen, I have to keep alert. It's difficult to listen when I'm fighting to stay awake. That's what happens with Peter and John and James. It's nighttime. When Luke tells us that these three are overcome by sleep, what he really means is that they're uncomprehending. They just don't get it.

Jesus stands before them with Elijah, the great prophet, and Moses, the leader of Israel's exodus—all three more radiant than the noonday sun. They seem to be saying something about a *new* exodus. Something about Jesus' departure. Something about Jerusalem. What can it mean? In the midst of their confusion, Peter and John and James are enveloped by a cloud—in the Scriptures, a sign of divine presence.

And from the cloud, a voice. A voice speaking to those first disciples and speaking to you and me. A voice affirming that Jesus is the Son. That Jesus is the chosen One. A voice charging: *Listen to him!*

Listen to the One who is the very Word of God.

Listen to the words he has spoken. For not long before this time on the mountain, Jesus has told his disciples what will

happen—that he will be rejected and killed. That his mission is inextricably linked with suffering. That Messiahship is costly.

*And that discipleship is costly as well.*

Now it doesn't seem as though Peter, John, James and the others have been listening very carefully. Maybe they aren't too sure they want to hear what Jesus is saying. Do they hear only what they want to hear? Do they tune out what they don't want to hear?

We have met those first disciples, and they are us. Like them, we mean well. We have good intentions. But sometimes we misunderstand. Could that be because sometimes we resist truly listening?

We know that the Transfiguration of Jesus foretells the glory of his resurrection and his ascension. It points also to his passion. If we're honest with ourselves, wouldn't we like to go straight to the Easter celebration and skip the messy Friday part? But according to Jesus, that's not the way it works.

And you and I are instructed to listen—really listen—to Jesus. Now listening is more than just hearing. Sometimes a parent will say to a child: *Now you listen to me!* If you've ever been that child—or that parent—you know that listening entails

obedience. Listening carries with it the connotation—and the expectation—that you'll *obey* the words you've heard.

Today we hear the Holy One who speaks from a cloud commanding us to listen to Jesus. Who tells us what it means to be his disciple. Tells us what it *costs* to be his disciple. Listen to him!

Listen to him who says that if I want to be his disciple, it means denying myself. It means surrendering all my illusions of self-sufficiency and independence. It means giving up the notion that I am the manager of my own universe and confessing that Jesus—and *only* Jesus—is Lord. It means living for him and in him. It means dying to myself.

Listen to him who tells you that if you want to save your life you will lose it, and that if you lose your life for Jesus' sake, you will save it.

Listen to him who insists that being his disciple means daring to take up a cross, not just once but *every day*. Being his disciple means being prepared for sacrifice, yes, and suffering.

Listen to him who asks you to follow him, to get behind him and to let him lead you down a narrow path. It's not an easy journey. It's not a brief journey. It's a journey on a long and winding road. It's a journey for which you'll need sustenance.

Listen to him who invites you to his table, to his table of grace, and there offers you the gift of himself. Offers you nourishment for the journey you'll take with him.

Listen to him.

For only through listening can you be readied and enabled to share in his glory.

The glory of Christ that transfigures you and me.

The glory of Christ that transforms *you* from one degree of glory to another.

The glory of Christ that remakes in you your most authentic self. Your truest self. The self that God intended and designed and fashioned you to be.

The glory of Christ that, through the Spirit's power, restores in you the glorious image of the One who created you.

In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Amen.