

## Mark 9: “Listen to Him”

It was hot, it was late in the day. I had already done the opening for VBS, then spent hours corralling the kids through games and activities. It was hours of, “don’t climb on that,” “don’t you dare hit them,” “No rocks on the slide,” and “Come sit over here.” So I was exasperated when I told the 6<sup>th</sup> graders for the, I don’t know, third time, to clean up to prepare for closing. One girl in particular, if I didn’t know different, I would have thought she was deaf. So, again, I was a bit exasperated when I raised my voice and said, “Clean up! Why can’t you listen!?”

To which she responded, as some of you who have heard this story know, “Oh I hear you, I just don’t want to do what you said.”

I am still employed here, so you can assume I didn’t do what I would have done to my kids if they said that to me or an adult. Which would be to pick them up and find a nice quiet corner for them to sit in where I wouldn’t have to listen to their complaints for a good while. Then maybe we could all appreciate the gift of communication and the fact that to “listen” usually carries more weight than simply the act of auditory stimulus.

On the top of the mountain of transfiguration, in our Gospel lesson, there’s a whole lot of communication going on. Peter is saying some stuff, but we don’t get any voice from heaven telling us to listen to his particular point, in fact just the

opposite. This is not to say that Peter had nothing to say worth listening to. Two books of the Bible bear his name, written, of course, after he sees the fulness of God's plan, after receiving the Spirit on Pentecost, and after being sent out as an Apostle of Jesus. Yes, those words of his are worth listening to. But not so much the one's on the mountain, as Mark reminds us, "for he did not know what to say." This book, Mark, is often said to be Peter's account of things. Which makes sense, "who is this Mark guy to say Peter didn't know what he was talking about?" – unless Peter, having come to see how foolish he was up there, told him about it.

But back to the mountain. There was more communication going on up there.

Moses and Elijah and Jesus are talking. These are some important people, no? Two of the great prophets, two who, in heaven have now beheld the glory of God. And here they are with the King. Who would dare foolishly barge their way into this conversation? Peter apparently. But soon a cloud, not unlike the cloud on the top of Sinai, shrouds them and a final, authoritative voice speaks. "This is my beloved Son; listen to him." And as if to remove any doubt about which of the three giants God was speaking about – only Jesus remains.

So what does it mean to listen to him? First, we certainly should pay attention to the red-letters, the words of Jesus, in our Bibles. I encourage you to take advantage of that throughout lent. But to listen to Jesus, is it only the red-letters - throw out all the rest? Some think so! As if we could say, "Well Jesus never said anything

about the stock market, or gun trafficking, or the newest sexual deviation – I guess we can do whatever we want in those areas.” As if the rest of the Bible isn’t worth our time or critical application.

But no, Moses and Elijah weren’t up there arguing with Jesus about what they wrote and preached. And it isn’t as if the Apostles Jesus hand picked, who wrote the rest of the Bible, were ignorant of what their master would have them preach. No, no, “listen to him” celebrates the red letters, but also all of God’s Word for you. And yes, I know that can get complex when we talk about sacrifices and unclean foods. Moses is aware that Jesus brings a new covenant – so are we. But we also ought be aware that the moral truths of God still stand unchanged.

Thievery is still thievery, and, as Jesus himself attests, “Male and Female he created them and the man will leave his Father and Mother and hold fast to his wife and the two will become one flesh.” So lets move past the misconception that if Jesus didn’t address it in red-letters, we don’t have to listen to it. Jesus is the God of the Torah, the Prophets, and the Apostles – Transfiguration is a great day to remember that. So, the first way we listen to Jesus is to understand that he speaks through God’s Word, the Bible.

But let us also remember that “Listen to him” also goes beyond my 6<sup>th</sup> grader’s notion that “to listen” only applies to audibly hearing or reading the words, and has nothing to do with our lives. And let’s be honest, at times we are all that 6<sup>th</sup> grader

who didn't want to clean up. We hear the word of God convict our pet sin and instead of fighting it, we justify it away. We say, "it's different for us," say, "it's not that big of a deal to God," say, "it's too hard to change now." And what have we done? We've audibly heard the Word, but have we listened? Not at all. In fact, that girl at least was honest enough to admit it. She knew she didn't want to clean up, she admitted that, but here we sit saying, "Oh yeah I want to do everything Jesus wants for me..." And then we don't. That's not called "listening," that's called "hypocrisy."

It's a sadly common theme nowadays as so many pay lip service to the King. "Oh yeah, he died for me, he rose for me, and gives me eternal life." Awesome! Amen! So how would he have you live? "Eh." Then they shrug and walk off. Seriously!?! He conquers the grave, the grave! He undoes death, he takes away every regret, and you are going to shrug? He made the universe, but you would rather listen to the news, the memes, the personality on the screen, or the friends. I'm not bashing entertainment or discourse, I am questioning our sources of authority. "Listen to Him," the Father says. Because, as great as friends and politicians are: Are they going to save you when the cancer comes along? Are you going to shrug when the home is breaking? Are you going to shrug off the depression and the regrets and mistakes? Are you going shrug off the addiction and anger and pain? If all it took to beat death and brokenness was a shrug – we didn't need a cross and

resurrection, if all it needed was a personality, maybe Moses, or Elijah, or a politician would do - it didn't need Jesus.

And so the voice of God says, "Listen up!" Take note. I mean literally, read that bible and take some notes, it will change your life. So let's take note of this conversation on the mountaintop. Luke's Gospel helpfully notes what Jesus, Moses, and Elijah were talking about. They were talking about "Jesus' exodus" – his leaving. Or in other words, his cross, his resurrection, and his ascension.

The prophet Elijah, the law-giver Moses, they were not uninterested in the King's work. They, by God's Word given them, had laid the groundwork beforehand.

Moses couldn't enter the promised land because he didn't listen to the word of the Lord and hit a rock. So you better believe he paid eager attention to the One who would fulfill the Law for him so he could enter the greater promised land – the new creation. As for Isaiah, read Isaiah 53 – that's your homework – the suffering servant song about the One who would be pierced for our iniquities. Yes, Moses and Elijah, weren't arguing with Jesus, they paid eager attention to His Word and celebrated that the Light of the World, shining on the mountain top, would go down that mountain to a cross.

And he does, which is so remarkable. I mean, notice he tells his disciples to tell no one until he is risen. First of all, it shows us that the disciples really should have

known he was going to die and rise – but when it comes time, they are all scared and hiding, not eagerly waiting. But even more, I think this shows us that Jesus isn't here to show off. Sure he shows a few of his disciples his power on the mountain, so we can learn about it, no doubt, but he doesn't do that just because he needs cheerleaders to clap when he glows real bright. Imagine if he shined when he was arguing with the pharisees, would have shut them up real quick, right?

Imagine if he shined in his glory and power when the guards came to arrest him? They would have dropped their weapons and ran. If he wanted to show his power, to show off, to save and serve himself, he could have. But he empties himself of his power, goes off the mountain and does what needed to be done for the salvation of Moses, Elijah, foot in mouth Peter, for you and me. For that girl who refused to listen, to us as we refuse to listen and hearken to the Word of the Lord.

And isn't this the reason God's Word is so worth listening to? Because His words are not just "do this, don't do that, don't have any fun." In his words you find forgiveness and life! And, not shrugging at those words of hope, but celebrating them, we might find that even his commands are for our good. And what a joy it is to walk in them.

So may we listen to Jesus in the fulness of all that means – it is a good word, even when it is admonishing us, and it is a beautifully freeing and hopeful word when it is forgiving us and giving us promises of hope and life. May that word not just pass

through our ears, but may it take root in us, and we pray it would transform us, to make us bold, to help us reflect Jesus' light, until the fulness of his promises are realized in his kingdom which has no end. Amen.