

Redwoods Presbyterian Church
Larkspur, California
February 10, 2013

Exodus 34.29-35; Luke 9.28-36
"And God said: Listen"

We call the story we just heard "The Transfiguration of the Lord." Jesus is transfigured on a mountain. His face changes and his clothes become dazzling white. The event parallels the story of Moses in Exodus. His face also changes on a mountain. Both changes take place as a result of a close encounter with God. Message: One radiates when one gets close to God.

Moses spends forty days and nights alone on a cloudy mountain with God and is given the 10 commandments. Jesus goes up the mountain with three disciples and is surrounded by a cloud which signifies God's presence and God's voice is heard: "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!"

In this, Jesus becomes the new commandment. Elsewhere in the gospels Jesus turns the 10 commandments into two but God says listen to everything he says. That's what we do when we read the entire gospels and the rest of the New Testament. And we listen in every epoch.

Jesus' mountain journey is the high point – literally and figuratively – of his ministry. After much ministry he goes up the mountain, has this peak experience, and then descends to Jerusalem and the cross.

Verse 51 of this chapter states: "When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem." That's why the transfiguration always takes place the week before Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent. We will journey with Jesus to the cross and resurrection through the weeks of Lent and Holy Week.

Of all the words God could have said on the mountain we hear "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" God could have said: "Obey his words," or "Follow him in the way," or "Serve him." God could have said any number of things at this time. Instead, God says: "Listen to him."

Thus, the sermon title: "And God said: Listen." The focus is on the word "listen." There's something very important about this word and its connection to Jesus; about our connection to Jesus; about our connection with each other; and our relationship to spirituality.

We are encouraged to listen and we are encouraged to listen to Jesus.

Consumer advocate, Ralph Nader, is often asked what forces shaped him and he often replies, "I had a lucky choice of parents." His wonderful immigrant parents handed down

to him traditions which he lists in his book *The Seventeen Traditions*. The first of these is "The Tradition of Listening."

The chapter begins: "One day, when she was in her mid-eighties, my mother and I were flying to California. Seated behind us was a young man. He started speaking with his seatmates before the doors to the airplane closed; kept talking as the plane took off; and was heard chatting over the Alleghenies, the Great Plains, the Rocky Mountains, the fertile California valleys, and into San Francisco. He never stopped talking, except to gulp down a meal and visit the restroom. When we landed, Mother turned to me. 'He didn't learn much in the past five hours, did he?' she said."

Nader continues: "*Listen more than you speak, and think before you speak* my mother told us from the time we were old enough to do either."

Rachel Naomi Remen in her book, *Kitchen Table Wisdom*, says, "We connect through listening." She writes, "When we interrupt what someone is saying to let them know that we understand, we move the focus of attention to ourselves. When we listen, they know we care. Many people with cancer talk about the relief of having someone just listen."

Morton Kelsey states in his book *Caring: How Can We Love One Another?* that it is impossible for us to love other people unless we listen to them. He writes: "We simply cannot love without learning to listen. The kind of listening I am talking about is listening which does not judge or evaluate. It is open and objective." He continues: "These words about listening may seem radical inasmuch as there has been so little emphasis on listening within the Christian community. Often among some enthusiastic Christians there is no attempt to find out where I am and gently lead me to the loving Christ. Instead I often discover a steamroller intensity which only desires that I agree or submit to their point of view. Evangelism which is not characterized by love and attentive listening is just not Christian."

More specifically, we listen to Jesus. How can we love God with all our heart and soul and mind without listening to God? How can we love Jesus without listening to him?

We listen to Jesus by being attentive to his words and deeds, by listening in prayer that listens as much as speaks, and by looking at the fullness of life in the world and listening to what it says. We will watch and listen this Lent as Jesus walks the lonely road to Golgotha and in doing so we will hear the pain of the world.

A friend from England sent me a picture from a vacation in the Canary Islands. It was a photograph of the surf in the background and a sand sculpture of Jesus on the cross in the foreground. He thought of me, he says, when he took this picture.

How do we listen to Jesus when we see him on the cross in a sand sculpture by the sea?

In thanking him for the picture I wrote: "In relation to the ocean, the suffering and dying on the cross reflects what polluters are doing to the earth. Jesus died for the sake of an ecologically sustainable environment. His resurrection signifies that life can emerge from

death.” In listening to Jesus in this context I hear the pain of the world which Lent signifies and the transformative life Jesus’ gives to us and our planet.

And God said: Listen. Listening is a wonderful way to celebrate the pinnacle of Jesus’ ministry today and it’s a great way to begin the Lenten journey. Amen.