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The Transfiguration of our Lord

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“Ears, not Eyes”  
Text: Luke 9:28-36

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

I find it very interesting, that in the Holy Gospel, the account of the “transfiguration” of our Lord, that right at the moment the disciples see Jesus in His glory, they are directed not to remember what they saw, but what they hear. **“Listen to Him!”** Ears, not eyes.

Was that an admonition, a rebuke, because they had not been listening to Him? Parents have to do this all the time, with children who hear only what they want to hear; or who have *more important* things to do than to listen to their parents! And so the parent’s frustrated plea, “Listen to me!” But children do not want to listen. They want to **do**. Peter wanted to do. Peter, *especially*, always wanted to **do**! . . . And what about us? Do we want to listen, or just **do**?

Imagine if you had been there, and saw Jesus’ glory. The glory of God, revealed for just a moment, as Jesus pulls aside the veil of His human nature. It is glory He always had – the glory of God from eternity, which He did not lose when He was conceived. He was always the glorious Son of God, all-knowing, all-powerful, all-present – He just didn’t fully use those powers that He possessed as He lived to be our Saviour and worked for our redemption. He humbled Himself. It is called His *humiliation*.

But on this day He reveals, for a moment, His glory, as He is “transfigured” – as His figure is transformed, or changed. He shines as brilliant light. Moses and Elijah appear there with Him. It is as if here is heaven on earth. . . . But as this happens, the disciples sleep. For Peter, James, and John, the journey up the mountain was just too much. They were tired. Their eyes were **“heavy with sleep.”** (You know how that is, trying to stay awake for that TV program that starts too late!) . . . And when they finally manage to wake up, it’s almost over! They almost missed it! How long had they been there? How long had they been asleep?

And so Peter, naturally, wants to **do** . . . something! **“Wait! Don’t go yet! I’ll build three tents!”** (Don’t tell me I climbed all this way and missed it!)

Peter, you haven't been listening! **“Listen to Him!”** Listen! They have to go. There is work to be done. Saving work. Cross work.

Seeing Jesus in His glory doesn't tell the whole story. Just before they ascended the mountain this day, Jesus had spoken *of the cross*. (Lk 9:18ff) Of its necessity. Peter had confessed that Jesus was **“The Christ of God”** but He didn't yet understand what that meant. That it meant dying.

Peter, listen to Him!

In fact, if he had been listening, this is exactly what he would have heard in the heavenly conversation between Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. We are told that they were talking about Jesus' **“departure,”** or literally, His *exodus*. His cross. For this is what they talk about in Heaven. This is the sole focus – the Lamb of God, slain for the sin of the world.

And how like the first exodus was this scene on the Mount of Transfiguration! Moses is again there. They are again on a mountain top, like Moses was at Mt. Sinai. There is again a cloud that overshadows them. There is the voice of the Father. There are a few people in the cloud, but most stayed at the bottom of the mountain. It was like a replay! . . . But it was, in fact, no replay. They were not talking about that first exodus, but about **HIS exodus**. A second one. . . . Moses couldn't finish the first exodus. As we heard in the Old Testament reading, he died on the doorstep of the Promised Land. Moses, the law-giver, couldn't deliver the goods. . . . But Jesus would finish it. He *would* cross over and provide entrance into the Promised Land of Heaven. The Gospel does what the Law cannot.

They had to go down. They could not stay. There is work to be done. Saving work. Cross work.

And so they go down. Moses and Elijah depart. The revelation is ended. The disciples look up . . . and see Jesus only. And He is all they need. . . . And so they go down, and Jesus **“sets His face to go to Jerusalem.”** (Lk 9:51) That is a nice way of saying to go to His death. He knows what will happen there, in Jerusalem. He knows full well. That is why He is so resolute. That is why He is determined that nothing will stop Him. Neither Satan, nor well-intentioned but ill-informed disciples.

Because you see, Peter, you can't do it. You may want to do it, but you can't do it. Only Jesus can do it. Are you listening Peter?

And how much more there will be to listen to! There is so much to hear and learn. Jesus prays and teaches how to pray. He explains the Word and teaches with authority. He corrects and rebukes; He encourages and forgives. He speaks the words of His Supper. He gives His baptism. He gives His Spirit and the power of the keys, the power of forgiveness. He speaks His words from the cross. He speaks of His resurrection. . . . Are you listening, Peter?

It is most important that he does listen – and for us that we listen! – for just as seeing Jesus in His glory doesn't tell the whole story, so too seeing Jesus on the cross doesn't tell the whole story. Both are necessary. That we know that the man hanging on the cross is, in fact, not just a man, but God Himself. The Creator dying for the sins and rebellion and guilt of His creatures. That fact makes Mount Calvary just as glorious as the Mount of Transfiguration. But that we will not know if we do not listen.

Peter got it, eventually. And so he writes in his second letter: we saw His glory; we were with Him on the holy mountain; but, ***“we have something more sure, the prophetic word.”*** (2 Pt 1:16ff) Visuals last but a moment. They are here and then gone. But the Word of the Lord endures forever. (1 Pt 1:25)

So Peter got it. Eventually, he listened. The question is, do we get it?

As it was for Peter, so too for us. We have something *more sure*. Ears, not eyes. Listen to Him! But are we listening? Or are we too busy doing? Are we too busy seeing? And are we believing what we see instead of what we hear?

For what do we see as we look around us? Our eyes will tell us that what we see is not glorious. Our lives. Our situations. Our families. Our suffering. Our Church. Are we not failures? Falling asleep on the job. What are we to make of all of this? . . . And what about those we see who do look glorious? Successful. Rich. At ease. . . . Remember – seeing glory or seeing the cross do not tell the whole story. Listen to Him! Listen to the glorious and crucified One. And our ears, not our eyes, will tell us what truly is.

For only as we listen will we see Jesus only, and see Jesus as He really is. As you read the Biblical accounts of who saw the glory, who saw the cross, who saw the empty tomb, they did not understand what they saw. It is the Word that opens ears, that opens eyes, and that opens hearts and gives faith. And that Word that gave understanding and faith to the disciples then is the same Word that is spoken today and gives understanding and faith to us today. It is His Word, spoken by countless undershepherds. His Word, given us to speak. His Word, that created all things in the beginning, and that still creates faith

and life today. His Word that combined with water adopts us as His children. His Word that combined with bread and wine feeds us His body and blood. His Word that speaks upon us His forgiveness. His Word, that tells us that glory and cross and empty tomb all go together – in His life and in *our lives*. It is His Word.

*But are we listening?*

This week we will enter into the Lenten season, and for many the focus will be on what we do – giving up something for Lent, going to extra services. We, like Peter, want to do. But Lent isn't about what we do, its about what Jesus did. His saving work. Cross work. Forgiveness work.

He had to go down. To save; to forgive; to suffer; to ascend the cross; to leave the grave. He had to go down, for down is where we are. Down and out. . . . And still He is coming down. Although exalted and ascended in glory, He is still coming down to where we are. Many churches say that Jesus cannot be present with His true body and blood in Holy Communion because He is in glory, ascended into heaven. But that is not the Jesus I know. That is not the Jesus of the transfiguration. That Jesus goes down in flesh and blood, and He is still coming down in flesh and blood, for us Christians to eat and to drink, for the forgiveness of our sins. And it is His glory to do so.

For it is not the glory of the transfiguration, of who Jesus is, that saves us, but the glory of what Jesus did. The glory of the cross. That allowing His flesh and blood to be pierced with nails and thorn and spear and **now with our teeth**, He would do for us what we cannot do for ourselves – give us life. And so He does.

***“And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, ‘This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to Him!’”***

Do not believe your eyes, or your feelings, or your heart. Listen to Him. That is what is most sure. ***“And when the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone.”*** And He is all we need.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.