

Listening Instead of Interrupting

The Transfiguration of Our Lord
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Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church

2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2; Luke 9:28-43

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

Now, just what does God have to do to get our attention so that we would listen to him? Apparently, it takes something big and splashy and larger-than-life. Like a transfiguration.

Most of us gravitate toward those big, splashy, larger-than-life events. I remember the first time, years ago, when my family and I saw fireworks on City Island while **on** City Island. We were there for a Senators baseball game, and fireworks were scheduled immediately following the game. Now, you need to imagine City Island and that stadium in the summertime—not under 3 feet of snow as it presently is. Well, when you are in that stadium, watching fireworks, it appears as if those fireworks are going off right above your head.

Of course, it took a few minutes following the game to get everything going. We were chatting and munching popcorn and people-watching and then **BOOM!** Immediately our attention was riveted skyward directly above us. I admit I sometimes looked down momentarily to gaze at my children so I could watch the beautiful colors reflected in their eyes and see their faces filled with awe at this awesome sight. (Plus I was a little worried that I would need to remind them, in all their awe, to keep their mouths shut, as the mayflies were dropping down from the stadium lights in copious numbers.)

The Transfiguration of our Lord is like God's version of a fireworks display. It is a moment when time seems to stop, and our eyes are drawn away from everything else and drawn to Jesus Christ. At least that's where our attention is supposed to be focused. Peter and John and James, Jesus' three closest disciples, his three closest friends, are privy to this wondrous moment—as are we—but it is clear from Peter's words and actions that their attention strays. No wonder they get the reminder to listen to Jesus. No wonder the voice from the cloud booms, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!"

First of all, the three disciples nearly fell asleep and almost missed everything that happened up on the mountaintop. Second, they start filling the space with chatter—at least Peter does. Peter starts going on and on about erecting some kinds of tents or structures so they can hang out awhile on the mountain in the midst of all this transfigured glory, and the experience of Jesus and Moses and Elijah conversing with one another can be experienced a while longer.

It's been said that there are really only two kinds of speakers: those who have something to say, and those who just have to say something. Peter seems to reside among the latter. Peter is someone who just has to say something. In the midst of all this brilliant light—as Jesus is viewed in his glory, his appearance changed, his clothes dazzling—Peter blurts out the first thing that comes to mind. He blurts without stopping to see if it makes any sense. Peter wasn't exactly listening, was he? In fact, Peter was **interrupting**.

As a parent, I have instructed my children over the years in a variety of things. I've taught them how to cut roast beef with a knife and fork, how to take a telephone message and give it to the person for whom it is intended, how to strip a bed and make it with clean sheets, how to write thank you notes. But by far, I think one of the hardest things to teach a child is how not to interrupt. My kids wanted to say something, and they wanted to say that thing right then and there, and I told them not to interrupt. I would say, nicely, "Hold that thought!" Of course, by the time the initial conversation concluded, and they had their chance to speak, they had forgotten what it was they wanted to say in the first place, which was terribly frustrating for them. And, funny, I find that, as my husband and I get older, we tend to interrupt our children more often, because we know if we don't say it right now, we too will forget what it is we wanted to say!

Peter interrupts. Peter interrupts the transfiguration moment that God has given him. There in front of the three disciples stand Jesus and the two great prophets in conversation. Pretty important conversation, I might add. Luke lets the reader in on a little secret about that conversation. Moses and Elijah are talking with Jesus about Jesus' departure that is to be accomplished in Jerusalem. What a euphemism is this word "departure"! It means his journey to the cross and his death. Luke tells us that Peter and John and James are sleepy, and as they struggle to stay awake they probably don't take note of the conversation or process it. Or maybe the glorious sight that surrounds them makes it hard to concentrate on the conversation. You and I know what the conversation is about, but the disciples are clueless.

Then, for whatever reason, Peter has to say something. We could cut him some slack here. If filled with awe and fear and confusion and exhilaration, maybe we, too, would talk a blue streak. But no use making too many excuses for Peter. Peter wasn't listening. Peter was interrupting.

And perhaps the Lord God, even with an eternity of patience to spare for his created people, was annoyed that Peter wasn't listening. You can't blame the voice from the cloud sounding perhaps just a bit curt: "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!"

Of course, Peter has had this selective listening problem before. Earlier in this chapter in Luke, Peter confesses Jesus to be the Messiah, the Christ. Peter correctly identifies his teacher, Jesus. But then Jesus tells Peter that the Messiah will be a servant, and give his life for the people. That he will suffer and be killed. And that those who follow Jesus will also carry a cross in their daily journey, and that to save their lives they are going to end up needing to lose them. I don't think Peter was listening very well at the time. I think those words about Jesus' journey to the cross went in one ear and out the other. I think those words about costly discipleship were never processed. For on that mountain, Peter seems to think that staying **up on** that mountain in glory is the right thing to do.

When we're not listening to Jesus, there is the risk we're listening to someone or something else. When we haven't given Jesus our attention, how easily our attention gets diverted. So today we hear again: "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!"

Jesus doesn't want to dwell up on a mountaintop. Jesus wants to dwell in us. Jesus, the love of God come down in human flesh, wants to give himself to us that he might live in and through us. And that can't happen upon the mountain. It only happens when Jesus

goes down the mountain to the cross to die for us. Then, raised again to new life, the Transfigured One can give his Holy Spirit to us that we might find our own lives transfigured.

Peter and James and John have been graced with a beautiful moment of truth from their God. They should listen to him. And so should we. **AMEN.**