

A Sermon for the Last Sunday after the Epiphany

Year C – February 7, 2016

Church of the Epiphany, Richmond, Virginia

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In the Name of God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

“Then from a cloud came a voice that said, ‘This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!’”

There are many voices out there that clamor for our attention. To whose voices do you and I listen? Whose voices that we hear are the ones that influence our thinking and our actions?

In just a few days, as we begin the season of Lent on Ash Wednesday, our alleluias will subside for a time. Our large cross up there will be draped, and we will replace the Gloria with the petition, “Holy God, Holy and Mighty, Holy Immortal One, Have mercy upon us.” Our scripture passages during Lent will take us and lead us down from the mountain top. We will travel through Lent on Jesus’ journey to the Cross.

In today’s Gospel Luke tells the story of how Jesus took Peter, James, and John to the mountain top. Remember that just a few verses earlier in the Gospel, he had told the disciples that he must undergo great suffering, that he would be rejected, and that he would be killed, and then rise from the dead. There on that

mountain top, they will have to come to grips with the horrifying truth that their beloved friend and leader must suffer and die.

They reach the top of the mountain. There something incredible happened before their eyes. Two other figures appeared in their sight, Moses and Elijah. The disciples saw Jesus as they had never seen him before. He was transfigured before their very eyes. They realized as they never had realized before, that they were in the very presence of the holy. They were in the presence of God. Then, Peter remembered what Jesus had told them. His was a very human response. His response was like what one of us might say when a dear friend or loved one was to tell us of some ominous thing that was about to happen to them. We might try to say “Oh no, that really won’t happen to you. That couldn’t happen!” Peter blurted out—and you can just hear him—“Master it is good for us to be here. Let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” Anything—anything—anything to make it right. You see, Peter had that male “fix it” mentality. He began to busy himself with James and John to try and hold on to Jesus and to protect him. But at that very moment, a voice came from the cloud above. The voice said, “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!”

Then, notice what happened next. As the disciples began their descent down the mountain they were silent. They didn’t rush to tell others about what they had just witnessed. The Gospel just tells us that they told no one any of the things they had seen. I’ve often wondered if in their silence they were simply being obedient to God’s command to listen.

“This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!” This was the voice of God speaking to those whom God loved very deeply. In our own day and in our time, these be

words speak to us as well because God loves us very deeply. We can hear God saying to us, "For heaven's sake, if only you will just listen to my Son!" We seem to live in a world, now more than ever, that is bustling with noise and chaos, where words and strident rhetoric are shouted with impunity. There seems often to be little check to verify the truth of much of what we hear in the media.

Imagine if you will, what this nation might be like if instead we were to listen to one another in an attempt to try to understand each other and work together for a common purpose.

Imagine, if you will, what our politics in this country might look like if instead of throwing insults at one another, our politicians listened more and argued less? I can only speak for myself but I confess that of late, I have become very weary of some of the voices that dominate the airwaves. While I have always watched the news in an effort to be informed, I have recently taken to turning off the television simply to spare myself the rhetoric that is so much in our faces. It comes from fear and it is intended to stir up fear and sadly, it seems to be working for many. As followers of Jesus, we are not the ones who put others in the margins. We are not the ones who build walls to keep others out. We are not the ones who demonize others. As a colleague and friend said recently in one of his sermons, "God is above politics. God is not a Republican. God is not a Democrat. God is God. God does not discriminate."

Imagine, if you will, the church, yes, even our Anglican Communion, if we were to listen intently for the voice of God, even if that voice comes from those who differ from us? How might our witness to the world be transformed?

Henri Nouwen, in his book, Bread for the Journey, has this to say about listening as he writes: *“To listen is very hard, because it asks of us so much interior stability that we no longer need to prove ourselves by speeches, arguments, statements, or declarations. True listeners no longer have an inner need to make their presence known. They are free to receive, to welcome, to accept. . . The beauty of listening is that, those who are listened to start feeling accepted, start taking their words more seriously and discovering their own true selves. Listening is a form of spiritual hospitality by which we invite strangers to become friends, to get to know their inner selves more fully, and even dare to be silent with you.”*

As we observe this last Sunday after the Epiphany in which we see Jesus transfigured in the sight of those who were with him, how might you and I become more open to the possibility of being transformed ourselves as we listen for the word of God’s Son, his Chosen? When God speaks to us in some way, do we listen? When God speaks to us in some way, does our ear and does our life become more attuned to God? When God speaks to us in some way, do we take that word and follow where it leads? Are we willing to be transformed so that we might be willing to see things in a new light and from a new perspective? And as we listen to the voice of God’s Son, what might be some of the voices we need to block out? To whose voices should we listen instead? And so, on that holy mountain, as Jesus was transfigured before their eyes, there was that voice of God that came from the cloud above saying, “This is my Son, my Chosen; Listen to him!”

That very same voice comes to us from the One who loves us dearly. God calls us to take the Word of God's Chosen Son and follow where it leads. The truth will win out for it will be truth that cannot be silenced.

Last Sunday in his sermon, Harrison raised the question, "Are there prophets' voices today that are voices to which we should listen? He suggested that there have been and still are prophets. He and I continued that conversation over coffee this past week. The names of Pope Francis and Michael Curry, our new presiding Bishop came up. Might these be prophets in our time? What do their voices have to say to us about our response to God's transforming love?

Whenever we hear the voices of those who speak of God's transforming love, we will find ourselves blessed if we listen to such voices and follow where they might lead us.

It thrills me to be able to say to you this morning that yesterday at Roslyn, our diocesan conference center, your vestry had one of the best vestry retreats I can remember in all my years of doing this kind of work. We had a good facilitator in Karen Salter, but we also had a vestry that was truly working together toward a vision for Epiphany you embark on a new chapter of mission and ministry. As Jesus was transfigured in the sight of Peter, James, and John, there came a vision we shared yesterday together. It is a vision that this parish can be transformed more and more into the likeness of what Jesus is calling us to be as we share the experience of God's love in caring for our own and also as we reach out and get to know our neighbors around us and our neighbors beyond. What are the needs of our neighbors to which we can respond? How might their presence in our midst enrich our common life? God's transforming grace was very present as

your vestry met yesterday. You will be hearing more from your vestry as they come down from the mountain, so to speak. I just wish you could have been there to see your vestry—to a person—working together, listening to one another, and yes, listening to God's voice in our midst.

When God spoke to Jesus at his baptism and said, "You are my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased," he was speaking out of love for his Son. When God spoke to Peter, James, and John on that mountain top saying, "This is my Son, my Chosen; Listen to him!" he was speaking out of a deep love for them. When God speaks to you and to me and says, "Listen to my Son," it comes from God's deep love for us that we might be transformed ourselves.

As we leave this Epiphany season with the image of a transfigured Jesus before our eyes, may this Lent be a time for us to listen for the voice of God's Son and follow where that voice may lead us. Amen.