

Transfiguration C, 2013

Text: Luke 9:28-36

Title: "Listen to Him"

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The sights that night were glorious. Jesus- face and clothes gleaming white. Moses and Elijah, the great prophets back on earth once more. The cloud of glory that had led the Israelites through the wilderness, that had descended into the tabernacle and the temple there surrounding them on the mountain. It was a feast for the eyes.

But the voice from the cloud doesn't tell the disciples to use their eyes. God doesn't say, "This is My chosen Son, look at Him." No, what does He say? "This is my chosen Son, listen to Him." The voice bids the disciples use their ears rather than their eyes.

Our eyes cause us no end of trouble. The first temptation was to the eyes. "So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate."

Your eyes draw you to lust and covet and desire what is not yours. What have you been looking at recently that you shouldn't have been?

Your eyes will cause you to be tempted, and your eyes will also deceive you.

You judge people based on their looks, their appearances. You look at a person's clothes, their race, their age, their body, the way they dress, the number of tattoos and piercings they have, and you make judgments about them based on their looks.

You judge churches and pastors this way, too. Lots of young families, neat, new facilities, must be a good congregation, God must be rewarding them and blessing them. Older church, older people, empty pews, empty offering plate, must be doing something wrong.

Your eyes will deceive you.

As beautiful and glorious as the scene was on the mountain top, what was said was more important than what was seen. Or better, what Jesus said makes sense of what the disciples saw. Jesus' words interpret the world for them.

What was Jesus talking about that night?

He is talking to Moses and Elijah about His departure, literally, His exodus. As glorious as that mountain was Jesus was going to leave. Peter wanted to stay. Jesus wants to leave.

Jesus is going to leave this world, and He's talking with two who have already made the trip. Moses, as you heard, went up the mountain and died there after 120 years of life. Elijah, you remember went up in the fiery chariot, in the whirlwind.

Jesus' departure would be different. Jesus wouldn't die peacefully after a long and full life. Jesus wouldn't have a glorious ride up to heaven, avoiding the pain and suffering of this life.

No, Jesus would die a painful, excruciating death, in the prime of His life. He would have a grave, a burial, a place to lay His body, something that neither Moses nor Elijah ever had.

This is what Jesus spoke about with Moses and Elijah. His coming death.

Jesus' death is the last thing He talked about with His disciples before He goes up the mountain, and it's the first thing Jesus talks about with them once He comes back down.

A short time later, Peter, James and John went up a mountain again with Jesus. Again, Jesus will go to pray. Again, the disciples' eyes will be heavy with sleep. But this time, it will not be Moses and Elijah who appear, but Judas and the High Priest's army. This time Jesus' face and garments will not shine brilliantly white, but they will be become dirty and soiled with blood and sweat.

On the mount of Transfiguration the disciples wanted to stay. Let's set up camp here. Let's stay here forever. On the Mount of Olives, the disciples ran away.

The Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration, there was a Messiah you could believe in- there shining in white, there with Moses and Elijah, there in the midst of the cloud of glory, that's what the disciples were looking for.

The Jesus on Mount Olives, that did not look like a Messiah, beaten and arrested, totally helpless.

The Jesus on Mount Calvary looks even worse. Crowned with thorns, beaten and bloody, nailed to a cross, hanging dead.

But the Lord says, "Listen."

Listen to Jesus, when He speaks of death even in moments of glory and wonder.

Listen to Jesus when He prays in Gethsemane, "Thy will be done."

Listen to Jesus when He prays on Calvary, "Father, forgive them."

And as you listen, it's okay to look, too. You can use your eyes, as long they are guided by your ears.

Jesus' words are the lens through which you see Him most clearly. Without my glasses I can't see much of anything. Up close or far away, it doesn't make much difference. My eyes are that bad. But through these lenses, everything becomes sharp, clear, in focus.

As you listen to Jesus, what you see comes into focus. Whether it's looking at the world around you, whether it's looking at yourself and your life, or even if it's looking at Jesus Himself.

Our gradual in Lent bids you to fix your eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who, for the joy set before Him, endured the cross, scorning its shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

But as you look to Jesus on the cross, listen to Jesus tell you why He's there. From the looks of things, He is just another criminal condemned to die. But the words of Jesus tell you that this death is for you, that in His death you have forgiveness and life. If you look closely, using the lens of Jesus' words, you will see your sins there, dying on the cross with Him.

Jesus continues to speak to you, even today. His words bear His Spirit, and with the Spirit life and salvation. His words forgive and heal. His words correct and bless. His words make this bread and wine His own body and blood for you.

On the mount of Transfiguration, Jesus speaks of an Exodus, a way out this life, a way that leads to the cross and suffering.

And yet the Exodus did not just lead out of Egypt, out of pain and suffering, slavery and death, but the Exodus led into the Promised Land, into a better place, that place that Moses saw before He died.

Jesus not only speaks of the Exodus, the way out, the cross, He speaks of the empty tomb as well. He speaks of resurrection and new life, not just of losing your life, but of finding it in Him. Jesus speaks of Paradise, the Promised Land.

These words of Jesus give you promises to sustain you through the difficult road that lies ahead for you. Jesus' words give you hope even when everything around you looks bleak and hopeless.

Jesus' words are there for you on the when you are with Him on the Mount of Transfiguration when all is bright and glorious, the places you want to stay and live in forever, days of celebration- a baptism, a wedding, a graduation, an ordination, as He speaks to you of the Exodus, reminding you not to linger, that something even better lies ahead.

Jesus' words are there for you on the Mount of Olives, when you are surrounded by trial and temptation, when the future looks bleak, when you are surrounded by enemies, when nothing seems to be going right. Here Jesus teaches you to pray, to watch, and to trust in your Heavenly Father.

And Jesus' words are there for you on Mount Calvary, as you are crucified with Him, as you die to this world, as you lose your life and find it again, as you confess your sins. Here Jesus forgives you, He promises you Paradise, and He teaches you to place your life in the Father's hands.

That's your life, listening to Jesus.