

Pastor Roy's Sermon from March 2, 2014 (Transfiguration of our Lord)

Children's sermon: Peter and Jesus and others go away to pray. First he doesn't pay attention, doesn't focus, then he talks and makes plan and tells Jesus and God what he is going to do. Is that prayer? What if you had a friend who never listened to your ideas? Would that be nice? So when we pray, is it good to listen to God too? Palms from our Palm Sunday celebration last year before Easter. We burn them and then this Wednesday we put the ash on our foreheads. We are remembering that we love Jesus. The ashes are a prayer—they remind us to pray. We begin the next big season with a reminder to pray. Lent is about praying. Back to the story. Peter learns to listen to Jesus. He learns to listen to God. He stops talking and starts to listen. Then he goes away with Jesus.

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

The writer of II Peter is talking about Jesus when he says, “Be attentive to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts.” The writer was just telling about how Peter was an eyewitness of Christ's glory.

What is glory? Isn't it amazing presence, ministry, love, peace, --personality and charisma? The highest glory is the presence of God. Glory is the stuff of Jesus' life that echoed the voice of God saying “This is my Son, my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.” Listen to him. . .Listen!

How do we listen? One way is factual listening--television listening—listening for details in a story, or the news, or the weather. Facts and figures, financial details. How much money is in the bank. Details, details, details. Putting together the pieces of a puzzle.

Another kind of listening is relational. Listening to make connections of meaning. Listening for understanding. Listening to understand the deeper rhythms of our lives and those around us. Listening to put everything in perspective. This is a sitting still, quiet kind of listening, often with nobody talking. Or if someone is talking this listening doesn't plan the next response, or try to poke holes in their logic, or gain the upper hand.

Relational listening enjoys the moment, the relationship, the experience, the living. We listen this way to know each other, we listen to God this way to know the deeper rhythms of God's nature. There is a great deal of trust in this way of listening.

We're not getting our way; we're finding our way. There is a big difference.

I think this is the kind of listening of which the writer writes when he says, “Be attentive, as to a lamp shining, the day dawns, the morning star arises...in your hearts.” This is listening for discovery. “This is my Son, my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.”

Who are you? Who am I? We learn this in prayer. We do not learn this by bouncing through life, one challenge, loss, failure, adventure, entertainment to the next. We learn our identity in prayer.

We don't learn it by talking and pushing our way along, filling the silence with anything so we don't have to face the demons, be still and face the truth. We are not praying until we listen. Truly listen, and become receptive to what we hear the Spirit telling us. We know when we hear the Spirit.

So the transfiguration is about prayer. Welcome to the invitation to a holy Lent. We see the glory and then we pray.

Jesus, the disciples, a mountain, quiet, here is the One who has learned to pray. The disciples are not praying. They are present as Jesus prays. They are off in their own worlds of power and manipulation. Suddenly they are startled by a powerful experience. It will not be their last. What is this brightness about Jesus and who are these two ancient characters. . .from the past? Are we praying yet? No. Jesus

is praying. . .Peter reacts—we must do something, set up tents. What is Peter talking about? Setting up tents? He hasn't any idea what he is talking about. He is just talking cause that's what he does when he's scared.

Peter is silenced and truly frightened by the voice of God “This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; Listen to him!”

Peter and the disciples fall to the ground, overcome. Perhaps this is as close as they come to praying in the story. Peter's journey is from not enough...to too much...to finally relating honestly to God. Even if his response is one of fear, at least he is finally listening. He is attentive. He has heard the voice of God and answers with humility, stillness--terror. Don't we all feel terror when we come truly face to face with the eternal, able Presence who meets our powerlessness, our weakness, our bafflement, our frustration? Surely our first reaction is terror and fear of the unknown...loss of control, not being able to determine our final route, to control our destiny. Our ultimate place.

Jesus touches them, Come, let's go. Oh, and. . .Don't talk about this. Just let it sink in. Don't try to control this experience. Let this experience control you. Learn to pray. Listen. Pay attention. Stop talking. Please! Stop talking. Let it wash over you. Let the listening give you identity—your own sense of presence, a foundation granted by the Spirit. Meaning. Be and become this experience of listening, waiting upon God. Allow God to define Godness. It really doesn't matter what we think.

We must not craft the experience, but allow the experience to craft us. Listen to the Spirit of God blowing, breathing through this space, this time, wherever we are. Be still.

Prayer is being attentive as the epistle says. It's not a mindless escape into God, nor obsessively filling the silence which otherwise terrifies.

[Jesus' prayer on the mount is a two way conversation with the lawgiver, Moses, and the prophet, Elijah, both almost prehistoric forefathers in Israel's history. These are the characters alongside Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and Judah before the Scriptures were written down, about whom stories were told which revealed the meaning of Israel, Judah. Stories which laid down the foundation of what it meant to live a life of prayer, a life with Yahweh]

God invites us into a relationship defined not by what someone else tells us, but by our experience of prayer, into communion, into prayer. The further we journey, the more we learn to listen, to stop supplying all the answers, and accept the powerful reality all around us and within us. God is speaking. Let this coming Lent be a time of open listening, healing, wholeness, and true peace not on our terms, but on the terms of the one who gently yet unmistakably calls into existence all that was, and is, and is to come. Listen.

Thanks be to God. Amen.