

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

The last couple months in Minneapolis, Minnesota, have demonstrated to us all that there is a lot of noise in the world. Folks up there opposed to immigration enforcement were using all sorts of tactics to hinder the ICE officers from doing their work, including noise — shouting, screaming, honking, and whistling, annoying whistling. They even invaded a Christian church service with their noise, preventing the service from continuing. Of course, our Divine Service is not about promoting immigration or immigration enforcement, and I'm not going to talk about it further. I only use it as a recent example of the noise-making that prevents dialogue. Dialogue requires listening to one another, and that's what's been missing in Minnesota.

Our Divine Service is a kind of dialogue. As Dr. Norman Nagel wrote in the Introduction to *Lutheran Worship*: “Our Lord speaks and we listen. His Word bestows what it says. Faith that is born from what is heard acknowledges the gifts received with eager thankfulness and praise. . . . The rhythm of our worship is from him to us, and then from us back to him. He gives his gifts, and together we receive and extol them. We build one another up as we speak to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs” (*Lutheran Worship*, 6).

“Our Lord speaks and we listen.” Just as our Father commanded Peter, James, and John who were with Jesus on the mountain, so He commands us: “*Listen to him.*” “Listen to *‘my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.*” Listen to Jesus.

This eyewitness account, as you heard, happened on a mountain. Lots of important things in Scripture happened on mountains. In our Old Testament reading, we heard the LORD say to Moses: “*Come up to me on the mountain and wait there, that I may give you the tablets of stone, with the law and the commandment, which I have written for their instruction.*” Moses did, and entered into the cloud that covered the mountain, reminiscent of today's Gospel.

Similarly, it was on a mountain that Elijah called down fire from God to consume the offering that Elijah was offering to Him, and, in so doing, Elijah defeated the prophets of Baal. That mountain was Mount Carmel (1 Ki. 18:20ff).

It was from a mountain that Jesus has been preaching these last two weeks.

And, significantly, the salvation of us all mankind happened on a mountain—the place of the skull, Mount Calvary.

So today, we heard: Jesus took Peter, James, and John up a mountain and was transfigured before them, His Divine glory shining in His face and through His clothing. Two others joined them there: Moses and Elijah, of whom we just heard, Moses as the one who had received the Law, and Elijah representing the prophets. As we heard last Sunday, Jesus did not come to abolish the Law and the Prophets, or cast them aside. He came to fulfill them. And the presence of these two Old

Testament greats bear witness to the ongoing importance of the Law and the Prophets to the Church.

You know that John the Baptist came in the spirit of Elijah. He came heralding the coming of the Messiah, bearing witness to the Light. But Jesus came as the Light of the world Himself (Jn 1:6-8; 8:12), the light covered in human flesh by His incarnation, but here revealed in Jesus' shining face ... the glory of God hidden in poverty and weakness, but here shining forth through His clothes.

Jesus is true God, "*the Christ, the Son of the living God,*" as Peter confessed it (Matt. 16:16), and Matthew wanted to buttress that confession here for Peter, James, and John and for us, for Matthew relates this Transfiguration event following Peter's great confession. It follows Peter's confession chronologically—Matthew says, it happened six days later; and it follows Peter's confession theologically, for Peter needed building up.

Peter did? After that mountaintop experience? Where Jesus said to him, "*you are Peter, and on this rock [of your confession] I will build my church*" (Matt. 16:18)? Yes, for Jesus also told Peter what was coming; and although Peter heard, Peter did not listen.

For Matthew records, "*Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, 'Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you.'*" (Matt. 16:21-22). Peter had stopped listening and thought he could instruct Jesus.

Peter was wrong, and he received Jesus' rebuke: "*Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man*" (Matt. 16:23).

And six days later, Peter wasn't done. Up on the mountain with Jesus transfigured, holding converse high with Moses and Elijah, Peter thought it best that he speak. "*Lord, it is good that we are here,*" Peter said, like a little child breaking into an adult conversation, needing to be corrected. "*Here. Let me make a childish suggestion: 'If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.'*" Foolish talk.

The Father broke in. While "*[Peter] was still speaking ..., behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud*" spoke. Perhaps with a voice that sounded like thunder as in days of old, the Father said, "*This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.*"

It was this theophany and this message, not the transfiguration of Jesus Himself, that frightened Peter and the two brothers to their senses. *“They fell on their faces and were terrified.”* They had heard the voice from heaven, the *“voice [that] was borne ... by the Majestic Glory”* (2 Pet. 1:17-18); they heard Him say, *“listen to him.”*

They needed this confirmation, not only of Jesus' true identity and Divine glory, but also “to undergird and support Jesus' difficult teaching about the cross.” God's salvation for mankind had to come in this “unexpected way,” via suffering and cross. The Father confirms it: this teaching is true, and from the cloud He “*emphatically commands Jesus' disciples ..., ‘Listen to him!’ (17:5)*” (Gibbs). The church is built on this word of Jesus—listen to him—on the apostolic preaching and the prophetic word, with Jesus Christ as the cornerstone (Eph. 2:20).

This word is for us, too. The Father's command is to us, young and old. Every generation, it seems, tries to remake the church in its own image, saying, “listen to us.” But the fact is, we all need to stop talking and start listening to Jesus. And we have it in the apostolic word available to us from the pens of those who were *“eyewitnesses of his majesty”* (2 Pet. 1:16)—and a sure prophetic word, too, that points our way to Jesus. Let us listen to it. Let us remain faithful to receiving Jesus' gifts in Word and Sacrament, and, strengthened by these, work in Christ's kingdom and even suffer all for the sake of Christ, knowing that what lies ahead is eternal life. We have made these promises; God grant us His grace to keep them.

For cross and trial lie ahead for those who confess Jesus, which is why we need that confirming voice of the Father reminding us to listen to Jesus, for Jesus also told His disciples, *“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it”* (Matt. 16:24-25).

So let us listen to Jesus, to His apostles and prophets, as He leads us on the difficult and narrow path to everlasting life. Jesus' path took Him through cross and death and grave. But that path also led Him to resurrection and life. Our paths, too, will lead us through cross and trial, but we have God's clear promise: nothing *“will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (Rom. 8:39). So, listen to Christ. He is near with His cheer! He forgives our sins, and leads us in paths of righteousness. And He will lead us to heaven as we trust in Him.

Therefore, filter out the noise. Listen to Jesus. God grant us ears to hear, minds to listen, hearts to believe, and tongues to confess Jesus Christ, crucified, raised from the dead, as our Lord and Savior, our hope for everlasting life.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.