

In the name of ✝ Jesus.

If there is anything going on in our world today, it is noise, a cacophony. Everyone is talking, shouting, screaming at one another, and no one is listening. You can't listen if you're talking. It's not good. In fact, it's a bit arrogant to think, "They need to listen to me, but I've got nothing to learn from them." And it's not just in the world. This kind of thinking infects some in the church, too.

The Father's words should ring in our ears today: "*Listen to Him!*" Listen to Jesus, the beloved Son of the Father. It's the Father's command to us today.

Now, of course, this eyewitness account happened on a mountain. Lots of important things in Scripture happened on mountains. God gave Moses the Law on a mountain, Mount Sinai, a mountain that was enveloped in a cloud, not unlike today. God demonstrated His power and might on a mountain as He sent down fire from heaven to consume an offering that Elijah was offering to Him, and, in so doing, Elijah defeated the prophets of Baal. That was on Mount Carmel. The last several weeks, we have just been considering Jesus' most famous sermon, the Sermon on the Mount, which was delivered on a mount, unnamed. And, most significantly, the salvation of all mankind happened on a mount—the place of the skull. From the Latin, it's called Mount Calvary.

In our text today, Jesus takes Peter, James, and John up a mountain. Its name we don't know for sure, but tradition holds that it's Mount Tabor. And there, Jesus is transfigured before them, the glory of His Divinity shining in His face through His flesh and through His clothing.

There, on this mountain, the two fellows we just mentioned, Moses and Elijah, joined Jesus. Moses was there as one who had met the Son before on Sinai, as the one given the Law that Jesus by His coming fulfilled. Elijah was there as one by whose spirit John the Baptist came, heralding the coming of the Messiah. Jesus was there as the Light of the world Himself, the light covered in human flesh by His incarnation, but here revealed, the glory of God hidden in poverty and weakness, but here made known.

Jesus is true God, the Christ, the Son of the living God, as Peter confessed it (Matthew 16:16), and Matthew wanted to buttress that confession here for Peter and 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—and we do, too.

Peter did? After that mountaintop experience? Where Jesus also said to him, “*I’m going to build my church on that confession*” (Matthew 16:18)? Yes, for Jesus 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.’*” (Matthew 16:21-22).

You see, Peter had begun to like the sound of his own voice. He had boldly confessed for the company of disciples and gotten the answer right...he had been commended. He was on a roll. He didn’t need to listen to Jesus any more. Jesus needed to listen to him. Wrong!

“*[Jesus] turned and said to Peter, “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”* (Matthew 16:23). Ouch! Peter’s mouth had just spoken words revealed by the Father, but, as he stopped listening, his mind was filled with the things of man, and his mouth filled with words from the devil!

And six days later, Peter wasn’t done. He was still making such statements — impertinent and impetuous. Six days later, Jesus took Peter along with the sons of Thunder up the mountain with Him. There He was transfigured before them...the Son of God manifested His glory before them. Peter was an eyewitness of His majesty.

Did that frighten him? Apparently not! Peter noticed Moses and Elijah with Jesus — that’s a bit miraculous, right? Frightening even? Apparently not! The Son of God and two of Israel’s greats were there talking together. Did that deter Peter? Apparently not!

“*Lord, it is good that we are here,*” Peter said, like a little child breaking into an adult conversation and needing to be corrected. He wasn’t done. “*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.’*” What was that? Talk about a mind focused on the things of man!

The Father had had enough. It was time for a bit of fear and trembling. The Father broke in. While “*[Peter] was still speaking ..., behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them,— again not unlike the cloud that covered the mountain in the days of Moses — and a voice from the cloud*” spoke. And perhaps with a voice that sounded like thunder as in those 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 Peter 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 — and on the apostolic preaching.

We all need to listen to Jesus, whether Baby Boomers, Gen X, Millennials, or whatever they call this latest generation, for each generation, it seems, tries to remake the church in their own image, saying, *“listen to us.”* The fact is, we all need to stop talking and listen to Jesus. And we have it: we have the apostolic word available to us from the pens of those who were *“eyewitnesses of his majesty”* (2 Peter 1:16)—and a sure prophetic word, too — that points our way to Jesus. Let us listen to it. That's what Chris and Melinda are promising before God today as they make their confession: that they are going to listen to Jesus's word and seek to live their lives according to it; that they are, by God's grace, going to remain faithful to receiving Jesus' gifts in Word and Sacrament, and from these work in Christ's kingdom and even suffer for the sake of Christ, knowing that what lies ahead is eternal life.

That is our confession, too. But let's not kid ourselves: cross and trial lie ahead for those who confess Jesus. That's 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.”* (Matthew 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 these do not grieve us when we listen to Christ. As Paul Gerhardt's marvelous hymn says (it's #756 in LSB), *“Why should cross and trial grieve me? Christ is near With His cheer; Never will He leave me. Who can rob me of the heaven That God's Son For me won, When His life was given?”* That answer is: nothing can separate us from the love of God in

Christ Jesus, our Lord (Romans 8:39). So, yes! 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.

Listen to Jesus. And listen once more to what the glorious Jesus did by His cross to lead us through cross and trial to life immortal, again in the words of Paul Gerhardt: *“Now in Christ, death cannot slay me, Though it might, Day and night, Trouble and dismay me. Christ has made my death a portal From the strife Of this life To His joy immortal!”*

Therefore, God grant you ears to hear, minds to listen, hearts to believe, and tongues to confess Jesus Christ, crucified, raised from the dead, as your Lord and Savior.

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