

02/11/24 Being Transfigured  
2 Kings 2:1-12  
2 Corinthians 4:3-6  
Mark 9:2-9

I think I've shared with you all before that I listen to audiobooks while driving to and from church. Last year, in 2023 I listened to 32 audiobooks all different genres. The funniest book I listened to was also the most heartbreaking, Demon Copperhead by Barbara Kingsolver. The most disturbing book I listened to was, In Cold Blood by Truman Capote. The book that kept me in suspense and on the edge of my seat the whole time I was listening was Exiles by Jane Harper. The book that the Session will be reading together this year and that Clerk of Session Chidi Obasi and I will be teaching a class on toward the end of this month is, When Church Stops Working: A Future for Your Congregation beyond More Money, Programs, and Innovation by Andrew Root and Blair D. Bertrand. The book that took me the longest to finish and was my favorite listen from last year was, The Covenant of Water by Abraham Vergase. I know some of you have read the book and enjoyed it as well.

I jot down notes on the parts of audiobooks I want to remember and may be relevant and even applicable in a sermon. Sometimes I hear God's word through a novel. Two insights I jotted down from The Covenant of Water that are worth sharing are, first, this nugget, "We don't have children to fulfill our dreams. Children allow us to let go of the dreams we were never meant to fulfill." The second nugget from The Covenant of Water I wanted to remember is when Big Ammachi says to Mariamma, "you can confide in quiet people. They make way for one's thoughts."

What are you listening to these days? Maybe you have a particular podcast you like to listen to? Or, particular playlists you've put together of favorite songs on . . .

Spotify? Or Pandora?

C-SPAN?

CNN?

NPR?

FOX?

Hulu?

Netflix?

Who is your driving companion? What influences your thinking? What voice comes through and makes you think, or remains with you, or lingers, and is there in the end?

In our Gospel passage for today we are commanded by God to listen to Jesus! For this reason I'd like for us to give thought to the voices we listen to, surround ourselves with, and may even be transfigured by in our everyday lives.

Today is Transfiguration Sunday in the Christian liturgical year. Transfiguration is the hinge between the season of Epiphany and the Season of Lent. Today we shake out the alleluias and get them out of our system and then bury them until Easter. Today we enjoy mardi gras and valentine cookies we'll even get to decorate our own cookies after church in Fellowship Hall as we gobble up sweets and sugars before the fast of Lent begins.

Today we stand before three scripture passages, one is the story of Jesus' transfiguration on the mountain, another the story of the prophet Elijah ascending in a whirlwind into heaven after transferring his prophet's mantle to his protégé, Elisha, the third, declares that the light of the knowledge of the glory of God is found in the face of Jesus Christ.

Transfiguration is connected somehow with dazzling light, prophetic appearances, an awe-inspiring presence, light shining in darkness, and through it all what remains in the end is the voice of God saying, Listen to my son, Jesus! These are passages we can't explain fully nor can we explain them away.

The language is poetic—in the sense that it speaks of a truth that reaches beyond literal meanings. And so we have a passage that says, Jesus' clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. We have a passage where people who have been long dead come to life—Elijah and Moses appear and speak with Jesus. We have a passage where the prophet is taken into heaven by a whirlwind. We also have a passage that reminds us that “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God is seen in the face of Jesus Christ.”

In the gospel reading, Jesus, perhaps troubled, and exhausted, went up the mountain to pray, taking Peter, James and John with him. On this mountain, something extraordinary occurs. Peter, in the midst of these extraordinary events doesn't know what to say when faced with prophets of old speaking with Jesus, a blinding light, and the voice of God, but feels he has to say something. Jesus says nothing. A voice is audible emanating from the cloud saying, “This is my Son, the Beloved; *listen to him!*”

Listen to him! Followers of Jesus need to hear that. Jesus has told his followers that he will suffer and die, but they don't listen. Even after the voice from the cloud says, “Listen to him!” the disciples will fail to hear Jesus when he speaks of events that will

unfold. The path that Jesus will take is so different from the disciples' expectations that they can't comprehend his words. Just before the transfiguration, Jesus healed a blind man. Shortly after the transfiguration, Jesus will heal another man, this one deaf. Jesus' followers however, continue to remain blind and deaf and do not listen.

Listen to him! booms the voice from the cloud at the transfiguration! You and I listen to so many voices today, many which seem and are wise and attractive—pundits, columnists, commentators, political analysts, religious gurus, celebrities, novelists, musicians, podcasters, ted talks, self-help pontificators, etc. Which voice rises above the cacophony in your world and in mine?

The voice from the cloud of transfiguration says that we can always trust Jesus and the voice gives an emphatic command on this Transfiguration Sunday— Listen! Listen to Jesus.

What does Jesus say when you and I listen to him? What comes to your mind when you think of what Jesus has to say to you?

At Wednesday Bible study we're reading through Matthew's Gospel. This past week we read the sermon on the Mount. Some consider that text to be the greatest sermon of all time. In Matthew's Gospel this is how Jesus begins his teaching.

- Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

- Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.
- Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.
- Blessed are the merciful for they will receive mercy.
- Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.
- Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God
- You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored?
- You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and gives light to all in the house.
- In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

These are some of Jesus' teachings that emerged from the Matthew Bible study this past Wednesday. Are there other teachings of Jesus that come to your mind now—teachings that linger with you and remain?

Call out what comes to mind of Jesus' teachings or if you are worshipping online put it in the chat. What teachings of Jesus are foremost in your mind?

The next question is, how can we and how do we really listen to Jesus? How do we follow this command from the cloud that says, "This is my son, the Beloved, Listen to him!"?

Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard once observed: “A man prayed, and at first he thought that prayer was talking. But he became more and more quiet until in the end he realized that prayer is listening.”

One of the best ways to listen to Jesus starts with scripture and prayer—read a passage from the Bible, and then ask Jesus to help you understand what he wants you to learn from that passage. This is straightforward, take, read, ask.

A second excellent way to listen to Jesus is through using a daily devotional. We have *The Daily Bread* devotional we order here at church and make available for anyone who would like a daily devotional. For Lent we are making available *The Presbyterian Outlook* devotional. If you’d like to receive that in your inbox let Jeanne Grillo know in the church office and you may receive that devotional by email. “The theme of this daily Lent devotional from *The Presbyterian Outlook* invites you to explore and observe new and familiar places in your community. What will God reveal to you when you pause, ponder, and reflect?”

A third way to listen to Jesus is to participate in the Wednesday weekly Communion services. We will slow down here at the church in order to show up for God each Wednesday at 7pm beginning this Wednesday on Ash Wednesday. On subsequent Wednesdays we’ll hear from Pastor Chris, Wendy Petti, Marianne Beardall, Sam Gray, and Cyndy Mamalian concerning ways that they are able to slow down enough to listen to Jesus. Each will share ways that they are able to hear Jesus’ voice. On occasion we

hear our Lord's voice through the voice of another person. Maybe for six weeks you are being invited to join the Wednesday night Communion service so that you may listen to Jesus and hear that voice that remains in the end.

All about us are voices clamoring to be heard and vying for our attention. As we move away from the light of Epiphany and prepare for the lengthening shadows of Lent one voice comes to us at the place of transfiguration, from the cloud saying, "This is my son, the Beloved, LISTEN, to him." Let us open ourselves to be transfigured and listen to what lingers and remains.

1. Maybe you need to find a Lenten companion to join you on the journey. Recall what Big Ama Chee says to Mariama in my audiobook, "you can confide in quiet people. They make way for one's thoughts."
2. Maybe you need to find a devotional book to help you on the journey.
3. Maybe you need to join the Wednesday evening services on the journey.

As you and I listen for the voice that rises above the clamour, comes through, remains and lingers, I trust we will know that we are being transfigured by love.

The voice in the cloud says, "This is my son, the Beloved, LISTEN, to him." How will you and I do that as we approach Lent this year? Amen