

Listen to Him

Transfiguration

Pastor Josh Frazee

Mark 9:2-9

Grace, peace, and mercy be to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

It used to be the case that correspondences would be sent through the mail—no, not e-mail; what some of you may deem as “snail mail.” Not long ago, the post office was the way to send messages across great distance. This system was in place before the internet; before cell phones; and yes, even before rotary telephones.

A song that came out a few decades ago gave reference to the kind of message which would sometimes get sent: a message “sealed with a kiss.” I personally don’t know if this was actually done—whether a boyfriend could know that a letter had been sent to him by the lipstick of his girlfriend on the letter. If nothing else, it’s entirely possible.

Since that time, as we know, many new technologies have come along and made the former ones almost obsolete—almost. Post office mail still exists. Nevertheless, it is far more likely for a boyfriend or girlfriend, or husband or wife, to receive a text message from their beloved, sometimes sealed with a special emoticon—be it a kissy face, heart eyes, or the like.

According to the commentator Lenski, God the Father also put a seal on His letter of love to us. In commanding us to “listen to him,” our Heavenly Father “put this seal upon every word of Jesus (Lensi Mark commentary, p.367).” In other words, God earnestly commands us to listen to everything His Son has to say in order that we might receive His Words, and with them, eternal life. By receiving eternal life, we will be with God for all eternity, which is what God has desired for us, as we’ll hear in our Gospel text this Transfiguration Sunday.

Verse 1

Our text began: “(A)fter six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them.”

Just a few days after Peter made the good confession and Jesus taught His disciples that “the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again”—after these events, Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John and was transfigured before them. Before their very eyes, Jesus’ clothes became whiter than any launderer could bleach them; and His glory as the God of the universe was put on display before them.

Peter and James and John heard the voice of their Lord and followed His direction. By listening to Jesus, they were given the blessing of seeing Him transfigured before them.

As we know, we “should fear and love God so that we do not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it.” Listening to Jesus’ voice still brings great blessing. God’s seal has made that the case. When our ears receive Jesus’ Word, we are taught how to love and serve God and our neighbors. The faith in us is sustained like a body receiving food. God’s Word is honey for our souls, and when we hear it, we receive that wonderful nourishment.

Peter, James, and John heard Jesus’ Word and followed it, and they got to see Jesus transfigured, but what is more, they got to see and hear far more than that. Our next verses tell us what happened next.

Verse 2

“(T)here appeared to them Elijah with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus. And Peter said to Jesus, ‘Rabbi, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.’ For he did not know what to say, for they were terrified.”

Once again, we hear that Peter and James and John were astonished by the appearing of Moses and Elijah at the top of that high mountain. Somehow they knew who it was there with them, though no photos or iPhones were around at that time. They recognized them, and they were terrified!

Perhaps it was in an attempt to appease Jesus’ great power, or perhaps it was just the first thing that came to Peter’s mind, but Peter then offered to make three tents for Jesus and the two Old Testament leaders.

What is of note here is that while Mark’s Gospel only briefly mentions that Moses and Elijah were speaking with Jesus, Luke’s Gospel goes into detail about what they were discussing. Luke wrote: “two men were talking with (Jesus), Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish in Jerusalem.”

It has been debated whether Peter, James, and John heard what was being said, yet it would be odd for Jesus to have invited them up to witness His transfiguration if He were going to prevent them from hearing what was being said. Especially when we consider that God would be putting His seal on all of Jesus’ words in the next verses.

Today, we should carefully consider that Jesus knew where He was headed, even in the midst of such a great demonstration of power. Jesus was certainly God manifested in human flesh, and He most certainly knew He was heading toward His death, His crucifixion in Jerusalem. All Scripture bears witness to Jesus and His purpose. He was going to the cross as God in human flesh for the forgiveness of all humanity.

Verse 3

To confirm that this was Jesus’ mission, and that God approved of it, “a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, ‘This is my beloved Son; listen to him.’ And suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone with them but Jesus only. And as they were coming down the mountain, he charged them to tell no one what they had seen, until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.”

Again, God Himself put His seal on all that His Son was about to do and all that He was saying. What is of note here is that earlier in the Gospel of Mark, the Gospel account we’ve been following this year in Series B, at Jesus’ baptism, God simply said, “‘You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.’” This time, God expanded on that and said, “‘This is my beloved Son; listen to him.’” Here God added His seal to Jesus’ Word, that we should listen to it for our benefit.

At the time, Jesus commanded His chosen disciples not to tell anyone of the vision until after He had been raised from the dead. Today, we live after His death and resurrection. That command does not apply to us. We listen, not only for just our edification—though most certainly for our own spiritual benefit—but also so that we might share the Good News of the Gospel with those around us.

In the front of the hymnal, there’s a prayer that sums up what we do with Jesus’ Word quite well. It says: “Lord God, bless Your Word wherever it is proclaimed. Make it a word of power and peace to convert those not yet Your own and to confirm those who have come to saving faith. May Your Word pass from the ear

to the heart, from the heart to the lip, and from the lip to the life that, as You have promised, Your Word may achieve the purpose for which You send it (LSB, first page).” That is always our prayer in and through our Lord Jesus Christ: that we receive the Word, but also that the Word has such an effect in our hearts that we then speak it to those around us with our lips, so that it might be life and salvation for those around us. So we continue to come to listen to Jesus’ Word, that we may be sustained, and that we might be able to speak the Word of faith to everyone—that Word which continues to bear God’s seal of love for us and which continues to proclaim our forgiveness in and through Jesus Christ. In Jesus’ Name. Amen.