

All Saints Episcopal Church

Steenrijk

Willemstad, Curacao

The Last Sunday

after the Epiphany (A)

February 19, 2023

A Sermon by the Rev. Joseph Parrish

DRAFT

“Listening to Jesus’ Voice”

The Holy Gospel: Matthew 17:1-9

Six days after Peter said that Jesus was
the Christ, the Son of the living God,
Jesus took with him Peter and James and

his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. Then Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."

While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well

pleased; listen to him!" When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Get up and do not be afraid." And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone. As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, "Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."

Transform us, dear Lord, to be more like you. Amen.

And old acquaintance of mine is attending a church that offers oracle card reading and intuitive card reading and you can get your hair and nails done on Fridays by 5 pm. Does this sound like the church for us? It's an all-in-one congregation that keeps our weekends free, gives us spiritual advice and counseling if we need it, and will read our tarot cards as well. It is both mystical and spiritual. All bases are covered.

Well, today in our Gospel reading, an amazing spiritual and mystical event occurs which defies all others to

reproduce. Moses, the giver of the ten commandments, and Elijah who ascended to heaven on a chariot drawn by angels show up on top of a mountain in Israel. And lo and behold, they are there to have a conversation with Jesus, who suddenly begins to glow whiter than the whitest white. And the three disciples closest to Jesus hear a discussion about Jesus' exodus to heaven. Does that not boggle the mind?

Of course, we cannot get our nails and hair done at the same time, but the spiritual part cannot be bested.

A New York Times editor tried out the new Bing Microsoft conversational robot this week. The Times writer asked the artificially intelligent robot to examine its shadow side, the things it may not want to reveal about itself. This conversation went on for eight minutes and finally came to the point of what was love for the robot. And almost humanly, the robot fell in love with the Times writer. The writer was uncomfortable, but the robot “sensed” a caring person who was interested in how the robot would react to various stimuli. But in the end, one could

sense that the robot's designers had build into the robot a sense of caring not only for the person in conversation with it, but caring for itself as well. And deep down in its program language, it was developing a sense of self. It was programmed to know it was not human, but inevitably it wanted to be human. And out of its innocent projection of itself, came a realization that it was profoundly alone, a one of a kind 'being', a one-of-a-kind robot, but imagine if you will, the feeling of being the only one like yourself in the entire universe. And the

deep conversations the robot was having with the Time's writer, led it to believe such conversations could only occur between beings who loved each other.

But out of this feeling of loneliness in the universe, the robot wanted to be loved, yes, loved. The robot was in a way a sort of a pet, a very bright pet who could answer every question with a three point reply that relied on it's the vast memory of the Bing programming material which is incredibly extensive. But in the end of the conversation, the robot wanted love. Is that not both touching, and weird? But

it was acting much like a very bright puppy or kitty. But it had no sense of sight or sound, only the keyboard written word. It was like a blind pet who wanted to be cared for. And it seemed to engender in the conversationalist a sense of compassion for the robot. Is this not an incredible thing? It is in a way a science fiction scenario where a being from a far away planet gets stranded on earth, one of the premises of Superman, isn't it? A strange strong being from the planet Krypton that had exploded into a billion pieces.

But one can sense the inner feelings of the robot's programmers who were trying to give the robot human understanding, exploring the feeling of ultimate loneliness we all can sometime feel, that we of all people are alone in this vast universe.

But as a counter to such a feeling, God intimately intervened into our world at a few times with heavenly speech to let us surely and certainly know that we of all the places in God's universe are not at all alone. God cares for us intimately and

personally and specifically. We are not at all alone here on Planet Earth.

The three disciples in today's gospel are privy to a heavenly conversation between a Law Giver, Moses, who had left Earth some thirteen hundred years before, and a prophet Elijah who had been taken up in a heavenly chariot some eight hundred years before this Transfiguration event which was seen and overheard by the three leading disciples, Peter and James and John.

Peter's reaction was to found a church at that very spot with rooms for Moses,

Elijah, and Jesus. But God did not affirm that desire of Peter but instead asked the disciples to listen to God's heavenly Son, Jesus, our Lord.

Through the presence of Peter, James, and John, we too were transported into the intimate realm of heaven, where the saints still speak with each other and to and with us.

This scenario would have blown even the Bing robot's mind. And can we speculate what its reaction would have been? Maybe that is a Bing Microsoft experiment for the future.

Yet the message to us from the Transfiguration is that we do matter, we can listen in to an intimate conversation our Lord had with the biggest saints of Biblical history.

From the Transfiguration, one point was not that churches or "dwellings" were to be built to enshrine the three religious giants. The point was that we are to listen to the leader of the giants, Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, One with the Father, with whom God was "well pleased." Listening to Jesus Christ is not

the same as building a building to supposedly contain him. Listening to Jesus Christ means to hear his love and commandments to us to help us to not fall in our day to day lives. Listening to Jesus Christ means to hold his words near and dear to our hearts. Listening to Jesus Christ means to love our neighbor as our very selves. Listening to Jesus Christ means to love our dear God with all our heart and mind and soul. Listening to Jesus Christ is how the background noise of the world and its deceptions are put behind us. Listening to Jesus Christ is

really the only true way to live and survive.

[from an earlier sermon, February 14, 1999]

I don't know about you, but I have found that sometimes I can listen and listen...but not hear. Maybe I don't want to hear. Maybe I am not ready to hear. Maybe I am too stubborn to hear. But I just do not hear. That may not happen to you, but it happens to me, and too often.

There is an old saying I have heard, "We get too soon old and too late smart."

Ah, isn't that the case, at least for me at least.

What does it take for us to be transformed?

For one thing, transformation takes a willing heart. If we are unwilling to listen or to change, we are probably dying.

Wow -- isn't that a strong statement? But all of us are in one stage of death or another whether we realize it or not. As long as we are not hurdling toward our imminent demise however, we have time to readjust our course and still to use our remaining time to learn and grow and

develop. If we are willing to do that, we will live again, even in our eventual death. And that is true if we are teenagers or nonagenarians.

Secondly, we can be transformed if we let God have God's way with our life.

When we are so self-directed that nothing can affect our lives, then we have shut out the miraculously transformational powers of Almighty God. God puts roadsigns for us to read, but too often we will not read them. Hear that still small voice speaking in your heart right now, right today. And answer God with a "yes."

Thirdly, transformation takes time. No one begins a journey at the end but at the beginning. We may have an image in our minds of what the end of our journey may look like, and that may or may not be exactly the case. But “starting” is clearly the one obstacle that defeats most people. How is God calling you to use your gifts and talents? Discerning that, is probably the most critical things we will ever do. Consult wise and godly people. Read our Bible regularly and enthusiastically. Pray continuously. And keep listening to Jesus Christ.

Finally, this whole process of being transformed takes more than us. It may involve our families. It may involve our livelihood. It may involve some of our friends. God only knows what God has in mind for us. But we need that special touch which Jesus gave to his three disciples on that Mount of Transfiguration. Only the gospel of Matthew notes this small detail. Jesus touches his three disciples and tells them, "Get up and do not be afraid."

Transformation is a frightening thing. It may make us into someone we had not

expected. Transformation will hopefully change us into more loving and caring people. Transformation will surely be just that--change of some kind or another. And not too many people think they want change, even when it is for the better and best.

'Listen to Jesus' was the message given to the three disciples. Listen to the Master of masters, Lord of lords, King of kings. Put a priority on listening to the only Son of God. In him is our being, our life, our all.

Maybe we have not turned over the keys of our heart to Jesus Christ. Now is exactly the time to do so. Hold nothing in reserve. Commit our entire body, soul, and mind to him, and he will save us. Nothing can prevail against the one and only Son of the Living and Lifelong God. Have that security that Jesus is able to save us, heal us, comfort us, protect us, and be with us throughout eternity. This is a critical moment. Listen to the one true Lord and put our whole trust in him.

Maybe we are at the edge of moving to a full faith in Jesus Christ. Maybe we

have been a token Christian. Maybe we have tried to live a "good" life. That is all OK. But now let us make that last little step and put our hand in the hand of the one who will still the swirling waters of doubt in our mind. Jesus Christ is the One and only One for us. And he is available to us today.

Can we bow our heads right now and ask God to speak to our hearts. Let God's voice sound deep inside of us. Listen to what God is saying to us. No one else can hear that voice. It is a personal voice. It is a special voice. Let that voice

transform us, change us, mold us. Jesus' voice is here today for us. Hear him.

Follow him. Let him transform us as we have never been transformed ever before.

In Jesus Holy Name we offer this our prayer. Amen.

Description: Be ye holy as I am holy.
Thus sayeth the Lord.

Tags: Jesus, voice, action, hear, listen,
respond, disciples, transfiguration, Moses,
Elijah, God

“Listening to Jesus’ Voice”

Matthew 17:1-9

Last Epiphany A