

St. David's Presbyterian Church
St. John's, NL
"Power to Change"
Dr. J. Dent

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(Transfiguration of the Lord)

As we once again stand at the start of a new season that the culture and even the Church doesn't really understand, we have a chance once again to reflect on what God is calling us to be and to do. I've had more than my share in these last ten days in bed or simply being at home resting. Being given the gift of time is a wonderful thing, unfortunately, the pain of a migraine, and the debilitating state of pneumonia have limited my options for the time given me. And I was able to break a tooth on Friday night as well. These things are reported not so much for your sympathy, but just the facts of my life as I seek to begin our Lenten journey with the close of Epiphany and the power of Jesus.

I'm struck by my limitations in this last while, more than my abilities or power. I feel much more like the sleeping disciples, on some of Jesus' retreats, more than the Lord or Moses or Elijah. Do you ever get to that point where you hate the very bed in which you sleep? I'm close to that. Because there comes a time when there is no longer any restful position within which to sleep. And when you're sleeping, it's hard to be expectant, watchful, witty or insightful. You're just there.

I suppose that's why Paul tells us to "wake up, o sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." The disciples were with Jesus, but once again he surprised them. He surprised them with an emanation of luminary power. Such a light was so bright that it caused them to avert their eyes, for who can look at the sun and not avert their eyes?

And then just as quickly, James and John and Peter see Moses and Elijah talking with Jesus. We assume that these representatives of the Law and the Prophets were encouraging Jesus and perhaps simply being grateful to the Lord for the work which he is doing and for which he will accomplish salvation for everyone who believes.

As we know, Moses was far from perfect. He had begun his adulthood with murder and fleeing his country of birth. In exile, God calls him to a monumental task in an extraordinary and supernatural way. And does he say he will heartily accept? No, he says he feels his brother is a much better

speaker. "Send Aaron!" he says. But Moses received the grace to follow through to the end, and although he never got to set foot in the promised land, he did get to see it, and now he is in that land with the Lord of promise. Moses knew the discouragement of performing supernatural ministries with the result of unbelief and even derision. He remembered the plagues on Egypt and the constant promises from the Pharaoh, which were not fulfilled. He could encourage Jesus who had undergone the same at this point in his ministry. He could tell him that he was the ultimate leader to lead people out of the land of sin to the promised land of full relationship with God. Jesus' exodus was the best of all.

And Elijah, also was far from perfect. He had performed many miracles, including the prayer for the withholding of the rain for three years, which was devastating, even if some of us would like to see that happen here. He confronted the 400 prophets of Baal, and the Lord won the victory through him. But once Jezebel heard about it, she promised to kill him and immediately Elijah went into what we would call a depression. He despaired of his life, he felt completely alone and he wanted to die because no one understood him. Plus he felt that he alone was the last worshipper of God. But God confronts him not with the fire or the wind, but a still small voice, as he often uses with us, and tells us that there are others who agree with God and love God, and that we are not alone. This Elijah also is encouraging Jesus to make it through to the end of his ministry, and that God is faithful, no matter what. Elijah knew what it was like to do the right thing, but still be confronted by evil and discouraging circumstances. He too would cheer on Jesus to be the ultimate prophet, bringing healing, truth and hope to the people of God.

Peter decides to add his voice to the conversation. He states the obvious with a common greeting, "Wow, it's really good to be here." Then he hopes to preserve the moment with a suggestion for more comfortable accommodation: "How about if we pitch a few tents here for these dead guys who clearly aren't dead right now, and for you too Lord!"

It certainly was not Peter's most wonderful contribution in all the things he says in Scripture, but he is trying to be hospitable, when suddenly the voice that really matters comes above all the rest. And today this is the voice we need to hear as well.

God's voice clearly and calmly speaks again to the identity of Jesus. He speaks first and foremost about relationship to God, that Jesus is the Son, who fulfills all the prophecies of the Messiah coming, the Son of God, the king to fulfill the promises to David, of an eternal throne. God also speaks of how pleased He is with His Son Jesus. And all those who follow Jesus can hear the pleasure of the Lord as well, if we but listen. "You are my son, my daughter, in whom I am well pleased."

And then an instruction, after being told again who Jesus is, and how much delight God has in Jesus, then the instruction. And this is a key instruction for the Christian life: "Listen to Jesus."

So much of our prayers are talk. We forget to listen. If we are quiet enough to listen, Jesus will speak. He will explore our relationship with him. He will draw us to himself. He will challenge us to truth telling. His kindness will be evident throughout. In the forty days of Lent coming, we are encouraged to quietness and listening. There is much to be heard. Our hectic lives and the noise which constantly bombards us is mostly our choice. Taking a few quiet moments every day is a kind of self-denial which can bring us back to the Centre. This is the first priority of the tradition of fasting. It is not merely choosing to cut back on sweets or caffeine or alcohol or food or television. It is also a choosing to use the time that might have been used for self-indulgence, to listen to the Lord and quietly be built up within the context of the life giving relationship to Christ.

The forty days starting Wednesday are meant to be days of reconsidering our lives and our priorities. How much of our lives are truly in the hands of the Lord? He can make this known to us as we listen.

Because as I have re-discovered again this last week, we do not have, I do not have the power to change myself. I am weak. I am unable to transform myself into something else. But as I choose to spend time with the One who can change me, I rediscover the true power to change. He does not always get my attention with brightly shining clothes or a face as bright as the sun. He simply waits on me to come, sit, quiet down, and listen to what he has to say. This involves the words of Scripture, and the mercy of God to simply receive.

We sometimes believe that we can change the world, our community, our workplaces, our homes. But that change is one that happens through the grace of Jesus working first of all upon us.

Lent is preceded by a small Mardi Gras here in the form of a pancake supper. The tradition goes back to the days when a true forty day fast from rich foods was preceded by a day to celebrate and get rid of the rich fatty products such as those that go into pancakes and sausage and bacon and the like, that would not be consumed for the next month or so. And so Fat Tuesday began (that's what Mardi Gras means in French). Later on, it became more of the Halloween type debauchery before the Holy Season. And now that's what we think of, when we think of Mardi Gras in other countries.

And Shrove Tuesday is another name for the same event, this one pointing out the tradition of confession of sins on the day before Lent starting. "Shrove" or "shriven" is older English for the confession of sins. But no matter how much you understand about the Tuesday before Lent, nevertheless, we are called to consider our faith and trust in Jesus Christ as the One who has power to change us.

I hope you will take time to consider what you will do this Lent to honour God's intention to change you for the better. Some minor inconveniences and self-deprivations can yield rich rewards. More than dieting, more than feeling good about ourselves, these inward disciplines help us to know God better.

And of course before fasting in any serious way, please be aware of your health condition and consult your health professional about any questions. No matter what you do food-wise in this time, you can make some time adjustments to your life and lifestyle that will help you reflect on the question, "Do I love the Lord more than _____?"

This becomes the core of Lenten reflection for all of us who know that we need to draw closer to God, and learn of God's ways, as we still have time, energy and desire to do so.

Let us pray.

