

St. David's Presbyterian Church
St. John's, NL
"The Transforming Presence of Jesus"
Dr. J. Dent

February 22, 2009
Transfiguration Sunday

We've had a day and a half of what they call "snow days" here in this last week. It is a real blessing to get what some might call a "mental health" day or just another day off. I've always been surprised how much people appreciate the storms here, but now I think I understand after reflecting on this and certainly agree with those who enjoy the storms.

It's not so much the storm itself, the high winds that moan, and make the house creak, no matter how strong or wonderfully built. It's the down time. It's the time to take a deep breath or a bath.

Although our culture and city does not have the crazy pace that cities with multi-million populations do, nevertheless, it does have a constant pace and a driving striving. For what, you ask? The sports, the entertainment, the partying, the intellectual and social pursuits, the arts, outdoor recreation, you name the things that keep you busy.

But what most of us don't have much time for seems to be that reflective and transformative quiet which allows us enough space to breathe, to think, to consider what our lives are truly about. Often we only get this kind of time and space when we are laid up with an illness or a chronic fatigue of some kind. And even then we are more likely to read, or watch TV or listen to music or the radio.

It's hard to have a disciplined place of reflection and quietness, and have enough courage and discernment to face our own lives and relationships. Sometimes we keep the level of external input (news, music, radio, TV, etc.) high so that we don't have to listen to the still, small voice which leads us to both the conviction and confession of sin as well as the challenge to deeper relationships.

Many of us have a few friends, maybe just one or two even that we let into those spaces of ourselves. We appreciate them, and they know us, warts and all. Jesus also had a few friends. He had the twelve and we know he sent out the seventy-two (see Luke 10), and the one hundred and twenty (see Acts 1:15) were there in the upper room praying after Jesus ascended.

But Jesus also had the three closer friends who he invited to be with him on the Mount of Olives as he prayed the night before being tortured to death. I think Jesus often took the three on what could be called prayer retreats, or just times away from all the others. Jesus also took time by himself, to pray, to rest, and to reflect. We saw this last week, and God encourages us to be like Jesus.

So Jesus, Peter, James and John are there on this prayer retreat up a mountain, possibly Mt. Hermon which rises 2814 m above sea level. We know this happened by the testimony of Peter in 2 Peter 1: 16 – 18, but we don't know the exact spot. This prayer retreat or mountain hike is probably something they did a good few times together although not always on the same mountain. However, something different happened this time.

In fact, three things happen. Jesus' clothes change. Moses and Elijah show up. A voice from heaven is heard.

- 1) Jesus' clothes changing was not a commercial for a new soap or bleach. It was an indication of his life, purity (often the symbolic meaning of "white") and glory. In many other ways, Jesus was a normal human being. Sometimes we get wrapped up so much in the divinity of Christ, which I fully believe and hold, that we miss his humanity. When we miss his humanity, we miss the part of the Son of God that we can relate to. I'm not sure how you usually imagine Jesus. Let me tell you what I think, in reflection upon the Gospels. He was a normal guy. He wasn't extraordinarily attractive, physically (in fulfillment of the prophesy in Isaiah 53). He wasn't rich or fancy with goods or show, as someone royal might be in that day and age. He was extraordinary in teaching. He was extraordinary in his ministry, both in healing and in miracles, or signs and wonders. But if you were simply to walk by him in those days, you would not necessarily be struck with someone extraordinary. So this transformation was an extraordinary event.
- 2) Moses and Elijah showing up was also an extraordinary event. Moses represented the Law and Elijah the Prophets. Both of these had been very close in their relationship to God. Both of these, I believe, were cheering Jesus on to finish the ministry he had started. We have no indication of what they said to Jesus, but I believe it was the kind of support he needed. We all need a cheerleader or two in our lives to

tell us it is going well. Because we don't necessarily know this on our own. I certainly don't know when it is going well. I know when things are not going well. There are lots of "in your face" kinds of indicators of this, but sometimes we don't know it is going well. So thank you to some of you who tell me when you think it is going well here and why. I deeply appreciate it. Jesus needed community and friends and support. So do everyone of us.

- 3) The voice from heaven confirmed the identity and the call to relationship that each of us is to have with Jesus Christ. This is my Beloved Son, listen to Him! I'd like to take the rest of our time together to think about this. Because listening is not our strongest suit, in today's fast paced world.

There is the story of the man who went to the supermarket, and the cashier asked him "How is it going?" He responded, "Well, my daughter just left home to hang out on the streets and I've just found out I have cancer." To which the cashier said, "Oh, that's nice. Have a nice day." We often go on auto-pilot when we talk to people who are, after all, strangers and we don't necessarily want to hear what their lives are like when we ask, "How's it going?" Or even, "What y' at?"

We find it hard to listen, many of us, when someone is in hospital or in need or in tears. Many of us try to fix the situation, when really all the other person needs is a listening ear that can reflect back to them the fact they count enough to be heard. Often when we do try to offer intellectual plans for repairing their situation or relationship, it does quite the opposite.

And we operate similarly with God. It's not so much that God needs to unburden himself with us, rather I believe we find it difficult to receive a message of supportive love and grace. Some of us don't feel like we deserve it, and probably we don't. It's not a matter of what we deserve. It is a matter of simply listening to the voice of the One who allow us to be, to have life.

Many of us did not receive the messages of love and grace we needed in our homes. Some of us did. But many of struggle to listen, we even struggle to get quiet enough to hear. You know what it is like to try and have a conversation with a TV and radio on in the same room with a road crew on the street out front, and the neighbor's dog barking. Sometimes our minds are like that when we try to listen to the Lord. We have at least a few things

going on that makes it hard to quiet down enough to listen. Focus on the Lord, and hear what happens.

So let me simply encourage you to quiet down this morning in this way. For many of us, this time in church on Sunday morning can be a time to quiet down. It still may be a struggle to quiet down, and many other tapes and burdens may come up in our minds as we seek to be on the mountain with Jesus as our friend.

There in that place we can sit with him, and his friends and not have to blurt out something that is a make-work kind of project or whatever Peter was trying to say because he was uncomfortable, or even "terrified" as the Scriptures tell us. To let Jesus look you in the eye and speak the depth of his love for you is to receive grace anew today, enough to live, enough to care, enough for living the kind of life we know we need to live. May I suggest, you choose to do this today as you come to the Table of the Lord.

Then with these words of love in our mind, we can come to our annual meeting, eat our meal together and ask questions and talk about what we are doing as a church community, or not, and trust God for our future.

Again, here at the table of the Lord today, I simply urge the quiet, and the voice of love that comes when we listen to Jesus. Make sure you hear Him today. And if you can come tonight, we appreciate your caring enough to do so.

Let us pray.