

# Listen to Him!

Psalm 2, Matthew 17:1-13

June 25, 2000

“This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.” Of all the people who have ever walked the earth, and of all the people who ever will, this one, and this one alone, is the beloved Son of God. Of all the people who have ever walked the earth, and of all the people who ever will, this is the one, and this one alone, with whom God is well pleased, so that this is the one, and this one alone, through whom we obtain the grace of God. Of all the people who have ever walked the earth, and of all the people who ever will, this is the one, and this one alone, to whom we are to listen, in whom we are to believe, and whom we are to obey.

Our reading today is about the transfiguration. About a week earlier, Peter had confessed his faith in Jesus as “the Christ, the Son of the living God.” At that time, Jesus had first predicted his crucifixion and resurrection. Then he took three of his disciples with him for a mountain top retreat. His face began to shine like the sun. His clothes were white as light. Moses and Elijah appeared, talking with him. Peter started carrying on about building a retreat center so they could stay a while, when a bright cloud overshadowed them, both light and dark, like lightning in a thundercloud or fire in smoke, indicating God’s presence but hiding him from sight. Then God spoke from within the cloud, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.” With this the disciples at least had the grace to shut up, and they fell on their faces, full of fear and awe. Then it was all over. Jesus came to them and touched them with the touch that had healed so many others, and he said to them, “Rise, and have no fear.” When they looked up, the cloud was gone, and Moses was gone, and Elijah was gone, and there was no more bright shining, and they saw no one but Jesus only, the Son of God, sufficient for all our need.

At least four things happened on that mountain top, which continue to happen for us today. First, there is an announcement of who Jesus is, the Son of God. For this, we have the voice of God from heaven: “This is my beloved Son.” Jesus is not just another rabbi or teacher. He is not even a new Moses. Jesus far exceeds Moses, who led God’s people out of slavery in the land of Egypt, for Jesus will lead God’s people out of the slavery of sin and death. Jesus is far greater than the prophet Elijah, who spoke the word of God, for Jesus is the Word of God. Jesus is what God has to say to us, he is the message, he is the gospel, he is the Son of God. Jesus is everything that God has to say to us for our health and salvation.

Second, there is an affirmation that God is gratified with Jesus. “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” Here is the life of perfect faith and obedience. Here is the life of unfailing love, even under the most extreme circumstances. Here is the willing sacrifice of his own life, for the glory of God and for the good of others. Here is the one whom sin has not corrupted and whom evil has not perverted. Here is the one who does not respond to hate with hatred, or to curses with curses, or to injury with injury. Here is the one who believes in, trusts in, and relies upon God alone, even when sin, death and evil do their worst. God is well pleased.

Third, there is a commandment to listen to Jesus. The voice of God at his baptism, at the beginning of his ministry, had already said from heaven, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” Now there is something extra: “Listen to him.” Even with the emphasis on the altered appearance of his face and clothes, the voice does not say, “Look at him.” It says, “Listen to him.” What words of grace and mercy, in the midst of the noisy confusion of our lives! We no

longer have access to see his face, but we do have his words. “Listen to him,” not to the other voices that vie for our attention, that compete for our loyalty, that struggle for our hearts and souls and lives. “Listen to him.” He is more important than the emperor or the executioner, he is more important than the president or the press, he is more important than self or neighbor, family or race, hunger or wealth, jealousy or ambition, fear or depression. “Listen to him!” Here is the beginning of life. Here is living water. Here is the bread of life. Here are words of comfort and assurance, challenge and encouragement, grace and hope.

To listen to him, we have to hear what he has to say. We are not free to imagine or to make up what we think he said. We have a written record of all that we need to know of what he said. We call it the Bible. I urge us all to read from it daily. Read it to your children and grandchildren. Have them read it back to you. Read it with your friends and neighbors. And come join us here where we read it every week. We have to hear what Jesus had to say in order to listen to what he says.

To listen to Jesus means not only to hear him but also to believe in him. Jesus Christ is the risen, living Lord of the universe and of our lives. To listen to him is to come to have saving faith, to repent of our sin, and to look to him only as our hope and salvation. To listen to Jesus is to hear what he has to say and to accept it, which is to accept him, which is to believe in him and to trust him in life and in death.

To listen to Jesus means not only to hear him and to believe in him but also to obey him, even as he obeyed God his Father, taking up the cross and suffering death. We are called to deep, personal commitment and involvement. Listening to Jesus is listening to the one who made us and to whom we belong, the one who died and gave himself for us, the one who rose from the dead and even now prays in heaven for us, the one who is not going to take “No” for an answer, the one who is not going to let go, the one who grabs hold of us from the inside out and claims us as his very own, the one who fought and defeated the devil for our sake and has no intention of giving us back now.

More than sixty-five years ago, during Hitler’s rise to power, there were some Christians who realized they could not listen to and obey the voice of Hitler, but instead they had to listen to and to obey the voice of Jesus Christ alone. Here is what they wrote in “The Theological Declaration of Barmen”:

Jesus Christ, as he is attested for us in Holy Scripture, is the one Word of God which we have to hear and which we have to trust and obey in life and in death. We reject the false doctrine, as though the Church could and would have to acknowledge as a source of its proclamation, apart from and besides this one Word of God, still other events and powers, figures and truths, as God’s revelation.

Jesus Christ continues to speak to us today. His is the voice we need to hear and to obey. Jesus has a plan for us. He has marching orders for us, and they may contradict what the voices of society or nation or economy or power have to say to us. We have to discern what the plans and orders of Jesus are. He is calling us not only to hear and to believe but also to obey, not only to have faith but also to live the faith, not only to receive but also to give, not only to be served but also to serve, not only to be recipients of God’s grace and mercy but also to be agents of God’s

grace and mercy to all with whom we come in contact— at church, at home, at school, at work, at play.

Jesus and his disciples came down off the mountain of transfiguration into the valley of human need, sickness, disease, want, and despair. And they came there to minister and to serve. It is not enough to be hearers of the word; we are to be believers in the word and doers of the word. That is why we visit, care for, and pray with and for each other. That is why we provide food for the hungry. That is why we build houses for the homeless. That is why we send money and clothing to children's homes, and support retirement homes, and build hospitals around the world. When God calls on us to listen to Christ, that includes hearing, believing, and obeying.

When the night grows dark, and the air falls still, and your friends are gone, and you are forced into the loneliness of your heart, to what voices do you listen? What suggestions do you follow? In whom do you place your trust and confidence? Upon what foundation do you build your life? What are your guides, your markers, your signs along the way? In the busy-ness of life, and the failures, and the contradictions, and the frustrations, upon what do you rely? And on those happy days, to whom do you give the thanks, the praise, and the glory?

We all hear the other voices. One says, with a snarl, "Look out for yourself; no one else is going to!" How much of my poor, misguided life has marched in willing obedience to this bad advice?! Another voice says, with a smile, "Do whatever you want; no one is watching; no one will see; no one will ever know." Sometimes it makes me forget that I will always know, let alone that another will know. Another voice cries, "Grab all you can, while you can, when you can, for life consists in the abundance of possessions." Strange that almost nothing I ever owned lived up to the joy or satisfaction I expected. Another voice says, "Work hard and you will get ahead." But sometimes, the harder I work, the farther behind I get. Another voice whispers in the wind, "You fool, you fool, you fool; all is vanity; all is death; all is dying; why do you struggle so?" Can I find the strength to refuse to yield to that lying voice? We all hear the other voices; the question is: to which voice do we listen? What do we believe? Whom do we obey?

In today's reading, there is an announcement that Jesus is the Son of God, an affirmation that God is well pleased with him, and a call for us to listen to him. Fourth, there is also a promise of life beyond death, a promise that the righteous one of God will be vindicated for his obedience, a promise that the Son of God who is to suffer and be crucified will be raised in the glory here first revealed. We have here a reassurance that God vindicates the suffering, sinless life of Christ, who refuses to strike back at those who hurt and kill him, who refuses to speak ill to those who curse him, who refuses to return evil for evil, who refuses to allow his love to be perverted by hatred. The world cannot tolerate the sinless love of Christ and so it crucifies him, but God raises him back to life, a new and different life, forever beyond the reach of pain or death. And this is the good news of the gospel: that the resurrection of Christ is the promise of our own. Though the grave is the end of life as we know it here, it is not the end of life. By the grace and power of God Almighty, when we die we will feel the healing touch of Jesus, coming to us and saying, "Rise, and have no fear." Disease, decay, decline, and death will claim us every one, but they will not hold us long. We do not belong to death. We belong to God in life. We belong to God in death. And we belong to God in the new, resurrection life on the other side of death. Thanks be to God!

"This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him." Of all the people who have ever walked the earth, and of all the people who ever will, this one, and this one alone, is the Son of God. Of all the people who have ever walked the earth, and of all the people who

ever will, this is the one, and this one alone, with whom God is pleased, so that this is the one, and this one alone, through whom we obtain the grace of God. Of all the people who have ever walked the earth, and of all the people who ever will, this is the one, and this one alone, to whom we are to listen, in whom we are to believe, and whom we are to obey. This one is Jesus Christ. And he says to us, "Rise, and have no fear."

*To God be the glory, forever and ever! Amen.*

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