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Zion Lutheran Church, Lewistown, MT  
Transfiguration Sunday, Year B

Mark 9:2-9

Let us pray. Grant us, O God, to hear your voice, and in hearing your voice to love your word, and in loving your word to do your will, through Christ our Lord. Amen

Many of us experience the world primarily through what we see. Our eyes are often the first to receive new information.

We have just spent a whole season—5 weeks—looking at or watching Jesus. We witnessed Jesus' baptism and saw the Spirit descend on him like a dove.

We watched him go to the seaside and invite some fishermen to follow him. We saw people gather around Jesus in the synagogue as he preached. And we witnessed his power to cast out unclean spirits and heal the sick.

Today we see Jesus in another light—literally! Up on a mountain—a place that always marks an encounter with God—Jesus becomes dazzling white and is joined by two pillars of the faith, Moses and Elijah.

We find ourselves in the exact middle of Mark's gospel today, between two other highlights of Jesus' story—his baptism and his resurrection. In the first chapters of Mark, we are shown glimpses of who Jesus is—preacher, teacher, healer, and Son of God.

In our reading today we head into the second half of the gospel in which Jesus will journey toward the cross. Up on the mountain God speaks directly to the disciples, "This is my Son, the Beloved. Listen to him."

In this age of visual stimulation, the art and skill of listening requires more instruction and attention. When Eric and I lived in Alaska we had some friends come to visit who are expert birders. They have been involved with the Audubon Society for many years and as we walked through the woods together they heard—and identified—bird after bird without even being able to see them. I honestly hadn't heard anything when they would say, "Oh, there's a such-and-such bird!" Their listening skills were amazing!

But listening to another person requires a different set of skills than identifying birds by their call. In our Stephen Ministry training we began with learning about active and reflective listening and every session has reinforced those skills. It takes time and practice to truly listen to what another person is saying—and what they are not saying.

Active listening requires reading between the lines through body language, tone of voice, and the messages that are difficult to talk about but might be referred to indirectly.

How might we actively listen to Jesus? What does he say—or not say—that applies to our lives as 21st century Christian Americans?

So far, we have given most of our attention to one side of our Taking Faith Home bulletin inserts. I invite you to take a look at the side with the list of Daily Bible Readings on it. Scripture is our clearest contact with God's Word. So this morning I would like to share with you a process by which we can really listen to the Word in ways that apply to us today.

Before we begin, I would like you to find a partner with whom you can talk about your responses to our reading. I know this is a little unusual for our Sunday morning sermons, but I think practicing this together will help you take it home. You might need to make a group of three to create your partner response group.

The first reading on the list is our passage from the Gospel of Mark that the children sang about. In this listening format we will read the passage three times with something different to listen for and respond to in each reading.

As I read the passage this first time, listen for a word or an image that stands out for you.

*Read Mark 9:2-9*

*<sup>2</sup>Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, <sup>3</sup>and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. <sup>4</sup>And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. <sup>5</sup>Then Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." <sup>6</sup>He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. <sup>7</sup>Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!" <sup>8</sup>Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.*

*<sup>9</sup>As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.*

Now share with your reflection partners the word or image that stood out for you.

*Wait*

As I read the passage a second time, listen for a question that comes up for you or something you wonder about.

*Read again.*

Now share with your reflection partners the question or wondering that came up for you.

*Wait*

The challenge for that second listening is that we want someone to answer our questions. A common one for this passage is wondering why Jesus didn't want the disciples to tell anyone what they had seen. That is a repeated instruction from Jesus throughout this gospel. Perhaps this question will make us think about times when we are called to tell

people about Jesus and when we find that keeping silent and waiting for a more appropriate time is a better choice.

I'm sure you had other questions or wonderings about this passage. Wondering about Jesus' words or a Scripture passage is a way of listening or paying attention to it.

I am going to read this passage for a third and final time. This time we will be listening for something God is calling us to do or to change in our lives.

*Read again.*

This reflection is the most challenging. I will give you just a minute or so to talk with your reflection partners about what you heard that God is calling you to do or to change. If you don't have a response right now that's OK. But if you do, talk with your partners about it.

*Wait.*

In our gospel reading for today, we have strong words and images to capture our imaginations about what it was like on that mountain top with Jesus and four of his disciples. It was bright, glorious, amazing—as well as terrifying, and perplexing.

This passage also gives us much to wonder about, just as Peter and the others did. How did Moses and Elijah get there? What did they talk about? What would I say if Moses or Elijah—or even Jesus!—showed up out of the blue? And what's up with all that secrecy about who Jesus is?

We are entering into the season of Lent this week. This season has traditionally been a time of baptismal preparation for new believers and baptismal renewal for others. Living the baptismal life is about listening to God's Word—including Jesus and the voices of God's people from longer ago. In addition to listening, the baptismal life is about receiving the Word into our hearts and doing something with it.

A common tradition during this season is to take on a spiritual practice of some kind. The three we will hear about on Ash Wednesday are prayer, giving, and fasting, or giving something up. All three are related when we give up something that takes our attention away from God's word and replace it with a time of prayer and devotional reading which would then lead us to give of ourselves based on what we have read and heard.

This kind of reflection, like we just practiced, is best done in conversation with other people. If you live alone, maybe there is a friend or small group you spend time with who could take on this active listening to scripture with you just for the season of Lent. Or maybe there is a family member you could talk with over the phone.

The letter to the Hebrews begins like this: "Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days God has spoken to us by the Son." The Son of God, Jesus Christ, continues to speak to us today in many and various ways,

including the written word of the Holy Scriptures, through the interpretation of that Scripture, and in and through our caring conversations with other believers.

Even when we have glorious mountaintop experiences with God and with one another, we eventually need to come down the mountain into everyday life and do something with what we have seen and heard. As we come down the mountain from Jesus' transfiguration into the season of Lent, may we find life and hope and guidance through listening attentively to God's Word so that the light of Christ shines through our lives and into the world.

Thanks be to God. Amen

### **Listening to Scripture**

Before you read:

- Pray—"Grant us, O God, to hear your voice, and in hearing your voice to love your word, and in loving your word to do your will, through Christ our Lord. Amen"

After your read the passage the first time through, discuss:

- What word or image stood out for me?

After the second read through:

- What question(s) came up?

After the third read through:

- What is God guiding me to do or change in this passage?

Pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

