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A Stephen Ministry Congregation

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**Transfiguration of Our Lord**

**February 26, 2017**

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**“Listen to Him!”**

*(Luke 9:28-36)*

Rev. David K. Groth

**Collect of the Day:** O God, in the glorious transfiguration of Your beloved Son You confirmed the mysteries of the faith by the testimony of Moses and Elijah. In the voice that came from the bright cloud You wonderfully foreshowed our adoption by grace. Mercifully make us co-heirs with the King in His glory and bring us to the fullness of our inheritance in heaven; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen**

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In our text, Jesus brings Peter, James and John with him up the mountain, where the three disciples are given this incredible and mysterious experience. Jesus is transfigured before them. It's the same root word in Greek as it is for the word metamorphosis. The appearance of his face is altered; his clothing becomes dazzling white. Then the experience expands to include Moses and Elijah, as if those representatives of the Old Testament, the Old Covenant are bringing continuity to the One who embodies the New Covenant, the new relationship with God.

Then appears a cloud on the scene. You recall it was with a pillar of cloud that the Lord guided his people from Egypt into the wilderness. Be careful in scriptures whenever you encounter a cloud on a mountain, because the presence of God is probably in that cloud. Sure enough, from the cloud, we hear the voice of the Holy One of Israel. "This is my Son. Listen to him!" Deuteronomy 18, the LORD said to Moses, "I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I

will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I will hold him accountable.”

Trouble is, we don't listen well . . . to him or to one another. By nature, we're not good listeners, and my fear is we're getting worse.

Have a look at that painting on the back of your bulletin. It's entitled "Freedom of Speech." It was painted by Norman Rockwell in 1943.

Freedom of speech was, of course, one of the freedoms the allies were fighting for at that time, and indeed this painting was used to raise millions of dollars in war bonds. The setting is a town hall meeting. A man in work clothes, presumably a blue-collar worker, has risen from the audience to speak. His jacket is well worn and stained, while the other attendees seem older and more neatly and formally dressed, wearing white shirts, ties and jackets. Somehow, with a paint brush, Rockwell conveys this man is not accustomed to public speaking. He's nervous, and yet he's standing tall and is speaking his mind.

But look at the other citizens of the town, in their white collars and ties. What are they doing? They are really listening to him. They are looking at him, hearing him out, letting him have his say. Of course, we have no idea whether they agree with the speaker or not, but as he talks they are listening, giving him a chance. They know their own turn will come if they want it. For now, however, they are giving him their full and polite attention.

I wonder, could this man get a respectful

hearing today, in our electronic versions of the town hall meeting? What would be his fate today in social media where others are so full of “casual rage.” A gentle, reasonable voice hardly has a chance to rise above the din.

I suspect today he would be mocked, called an idiot, laughed at, belittled, and ultimately silenced by an audience he cannot see. [I’m indebted to Bob Green’s wonderful article “Ode to Civil Discourse” in the WSJ, 2/10/17.]

Listening to another; it’s such a simple concept, and yet it’s one we really struggle with. I’ve noticed in restaurants how families will be at table together, but one or two heads will be buried in a cell phone. They’re not really listening to one another, giving one another their full attention, or perhaps even a bit of their attention.

Similarly, there was an article in the newspaper about opera companies trying to lure young adults into opera, and one way they’re doing it is by having a section of the concert hall where cell phones are allowed, even encouraged, so long as they’re put on mute. They’re trying to get social media working in opera’s favor. It showed a picture of several roles of young people at the opera. In the subdued lighting of the theater their faces glow in the light of their cell phones. They were tweeting, texting, snap chatting and the like (WSJ, Nov. 18, 2016). Their attention to the opera was skimming along the surface as if on a jet ski, rather than diving down as if scuba diving. They were not really listening. Like Peter, they were too busy generating their own words.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, “The first service that one owes to others . . . consists of listening to them. Just as the love of God begins with listening to his Word, so the beginning of love for our brothers and sisters is learning to listen to them.”

One of the greatest gifts we can give someone is to really listen to them. That’s one reason I’m so glad we have the Stephen Ministry here, people who, in training, spend a lot of time honing their listening skills, because I’m convinced by nature, we’re not very good at it, and in today’s context, we’re getting worse.

As we refuse to really listen to one another, so also we refuse to really listen to God.

God promises to speak to us through his Word. He promises his Word is a lamp to our feet and light for our path. But our nature is to go just about anywhere for guidance before we go to his Word. We’ll trust our own instincts, our own wisdom, our own feelings more than his Word. We will bend to public opinion before we bend to his Word. We’ll put more weight on the celebrity’s opinion than on the Word, and we’ll share our own opinions without ever really sharing his Word. Like Peter, we are more ready at the mouth than we are with the ears.

“This is my Son. Listen to him.” One of my professors at the seminary suggested when you first look at an appointed text that you’ll be preaching on, close the door, turn your phone off, get rid of all the distractions you can, and read it over ten times slowly and quietly. Don’t start forming your own thoughts, your own words. Just read it. Don’t start

reading what others have said about the text. Just let God speak to you through his Word.

This is my Son. Listen to him. God isn't telling us to listen to Jesus or else. The Father is telling us to listen to his Son, mostly because the Father loves us. The Father is pointing to his Son because he knows Jesus is the only source of our salvation. Remember Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life, and no matter what anyone else says, no one comes to the Father except through him.

So listen to him, because his thoughts are not your thoughts and his ways are not your ways. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are his ways higher than our ways, and his thoughts than our thoughts (Is. 55:8ff). So if you want something better, something higher than the standard fare that comes from the mouth of men, you're going to have to listen to him.

You see, it's for our good that God tells us to listen to his Son. It's in our best interest to listen to Him. The Father is telling us to listen to his Son Jesus because he loves us, and desires that each of us should be saved.

Listen to him, because you cannot by your own reason or strength believe in him or come him, or find him, but the Holy Spirit calls you by the Gospel. Listen to him, because "faith comes by hearing the message, and the message is heard through the Word of Christ" (Rom. 10:17). Listen to the message of Christ, because without faith there is no salvation. Listen to him, because Jesus promises, "Whoever hears my words and believes . . . has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has

crossed over from death to life” (Jn. 5:24).

Listen to him, because where else are you going to go for that truth? He has the words of eternal life (Jn. 6:68).

To Peter, James and John on that day, and to you and me on this day, the voice from the cloud, the voice of your loving Father in heaven says, “This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him!” Amen.

