First Presbyterian Church of Soda Springs

February 11, 2024

Mark 9:2-9

2 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, 3 and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. 4 And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. 5 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.” 6 He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. 7 Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!” 8 Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus. 9 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.

Imagine, if you will, being invited by Jesus to take a trip with him. Just you, and a couple of other friends; a chance to get away from all of the day to day hassles and crowds. I’d be pretty excited if Jesus had chosen me to be part of this adventure. HA! Jesus chose me, and not you! Take that you other disciples!

Now imagine once you’ve made the trip, you’re all up on this mountain, and all of a sudden, poof! Jesus is transformed! His clothes become whiter than any dry cleaner could possibly get them and then to top it off, just like that, Moses and Elijah are standing there, big as you please, having a conversation with Jesus! Is this a dream or a hallucination? What the heck is going on here?

Then Peter, poor, foolish Peter starts babbling about building three dwellings, or monuments, to Jesus, Moses and Elijah. He’s running his mouth because he’s afraid, which is perfectly understandable, but c’mon Peter, you’re kinda missing the point here!

But wait! As strange as this experience is, it’s about to get even weirder! It starts clouding up and out of that big ‘ol’ cloud, comes a voice! And not just any voice, but THE VOICE; God’s voice! And what does God say, in this weird, frightening moment? *"This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!”*  Then, just like that, quicker than you can snap your fingers, the cloud’s gone, Moses and Elijah are gone, and Jesus is looking like his normal self again. WOW, that was one heck of a dream!

Except, of course, it wasn’t a dream. As they start back down the mountain, Jesus orders them not to say anything about it until after, as the end of verse 9 puts it, *“The Son of Man had risen from the dead.”* Wise move on Jesus’ part, don’t you think? Talking about it to anyone could have landed our boys in the first century version of the loony bin.

Over the years, I’ve had the privilege of preaching about the Transfiguration from all four Gospel accounts. Each year, when this comes up in the Lectionary, I’ve focused on a different element of the story; the transformation that Jesus undergoes, the whiteness of his clothes, why it was only Peter, James and John and not any of the other disciples, who were picked to witness such an event, and the significance of Elijah and Moses’ presence. Today, however, I’m choosing to focus on the voice that comes out of the cloud; THE VOICE, God’s voice.

There are only a few instances in the entirety of scripture, where God speaks out loud to audiences of more than one. God’s words here, are similar to the words God spoke at Jesus’ baptism, as recorded by Matthew in chapter 3, verse 17; which reads, *“And lo a voice from heaven, saying, this is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”* These two occurrences are arguably the most famous examples of God speaking directly to humankind.

For the most part, though, God seems to prefer one to one conversation. This, of course, can lead to some issues. If God is speaking through a single person, as God has chosen to do for millennia, how can we be sure that it’s actually God speaking and not someone who’s presuming to speak on God’s behalf, for whatever reason? How can we know it’s God speaking and not some poor mentally ill soul who hears voices in their head? Or how can we trust that it’s a true prophet passing on God’s word and not some shyster out for their own gain?

In our modern sophisticated world, it’s very easy to discount the fact that God still speaks. We inherently distrust people who claim to speak on God’s behalf and who are eager to take on the mantel of prophet. The world we live in is a far, far different one from the world where Jonah was able to get an entire city to repent, simply by sharing God’s word. That said, as different as our world is from the world of Jonah and Nineveh, I truly believe that God still speaks through modern-day prophets.

Douglas Todd, a writer for the Vancouver Sun, describes prophets this way, *“Some people think prophets are simply men and women who predict the future, like fortune tellers. But it’s more accurate to say prophets try to warn a society about how its unethical trajectories are leading to calamity.”*

I like this definition, and if we were to make our own lists of modern day prophets, my list would have to include, among others, Dorothy Day, (1897-1980), who in the 1930s, helped to establish the Catholic Worker Movement, a pacifist movement that combines direct aid for the poor and homeless with nonviolent direct action on their behalf. I’d have to include Fanny Lou Hamer (1917-1977), an American voting and women's rights activist, community organizer, who in the 1960s, helped thousands of African Americans register to vote in Mississippi. I’d also include Howard Thurman (1899-1981), an American author, philosopher, theologian, educator, and civil rights leader, whose theology of radical nonviolence influenced and shaped a generation of civil rights activists. And, of course, arguably the best-known prophet of the Twentieth Century, the Reverend Doctor Martin Luther King, Jr. I’m sure that you could easily come up with your own list of modern-day prophets, based on Douglas Todd’s criteria.

All of these modern-day prophets, heard the voice of God calling them to advocate for the poor, the needy, the marginalized and the outcasts. All of these modern-day prophets called out the injustice in contemporary American life and the unethical trajectoriesoursociety was on. By answering God’s call, and by listening to, and following, the teachings of the Beloved of God, these prophets helped begin the process of transforming our society and our world.

While it’s vitally important to recognize the fact that God indeed spoke to these brave people, it’s equally important to realize and understand that God speaks to each and every one of us too. And that instantly brings us back to the question I asked earlier; how do we know that it’s God speaking and not our own egos, or the onset of mental instability?

See, the issue is that God rarely speaks with a thundering voice, right? There are certainly times when I imagine that we all wish God would speak loudly, so any doubts in our minds would be put to rest. That would make all of our lives much easier, wouldn’t it? But that’s just not the way God works.

So, it begs the question; how does God speak to you? I asked that question at Bible study, and the answers were all over the map, which is just what I expected. I suspect that there are as many ways for God to speak as there are people to hear.

When God speaks to me and wants me to do something that I’m reluctant to do, my first instinct is to push back. Oh, you have to be kidding, God. You want me to do what? Usually, when that happens, and I resist God’s call, I can’t get it out of my mind until I pay attention and take the steps to do what God is calling me to do. The minute I let go, and listen to the voice of God speaking to me, through the Holy Spirit, all the obstacles, real or imagined, seem to fall away and it becomes a situation where everything goes as smooth as silk. You’d think, by now, I would have learned better than not to listen, when God speaks, because my stubborn Irish self is definitely no match for God.

Now, for me, that’s how I know it’s God, and me not hallucinating or having a mental breakdown, and each of you will probably experience that dynamic differently from the way I experience it. The point, here, is ignoring what God is saying to us can keep us from experiencing the all of the good things that God has in store for us.

Here’s the bottom line, folks. God still speaks to modern day prophets and God still speaks to us. God rarely speaks to us with a thundering voice, as much as we may like God to. Sometimes, God speaks to us in a whisper and that can make it very easy to miss what God is saying. So, your charge this week is to listen closely to what God is trying to saying to you. Be willing to hear God’s voice through unexpected people and in unexpected places and situations. And then, go out and put God’s words into action, for your own sake and for the sake of our world. AMEN