

March 13, 2005
Fifth Sunday of Lent
Patchogue Church of the Nazarene

"A Mountain Of Meaning"
Matt 17:1-9 NLT

Six days later Jesus took Peter and the two brothers, James and John, and led them up a high mountain. 2 As the men watched, Jesus' appearance changed so that his face shone like the sun, and his clothing became dazzling white. 3 Suddenly, Moses and Elijah appeared and began talking with Jesus. 4 Peter blurted out, "Lord, this is wonderful! (it is good for us to be here [NIV]) If you want me to, I'll make three shrines, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."

5 But even as he said it, a bright cloud came over them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my beloved Son (or [NIV] "This is my Son, whom I love"), and I am fully pleased with him. Listen to him." 6 The disciples were terrified and fell face down on the ground.

7 Jesus came over and touched them. "Get up," he said, "don't be afraid." 8 And when they looked, they saw only Jesus with them. 9 As they descended the mountain, Jesus commanded them, "Don't tell anyone what you have seen until I, the Son of Man, have been raised from the dead."

A brilliant magician was performing on an ocean liner. But every time he did a trick, the Captain's parrot would yell, "It's a trick. He's a phony. That's not magic." Then one evening during a storm, the ship sank while the magician was performing. The parrot and the magician ended up in the same lifeboat. For several days they just glared at each other, neither saying a word to the other. Finally the parrot said, "OK, I give up. What did you do with the ship?"

The parrot couldn't explain that last trick! It was too much to comprehend, even for a smart parrot. Peter said to Jesus, "'Lord, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters (shrines) —one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.'" Scholars over the years have tried to explain what in the world Peter meant by this suggestion. But, I think trying to find meaning to these words is pointless. It's simply the way Matthew explains: Peter was frightened and he just blurted out the first thing that came to into his head. He simply could not comprehend what was happening.

In life, moments occur that are incomprehensible. The birth of one's own child is one of those moments. The loss of a loved one is one of those moments. September 11 was one of those moments. There are mountaintop and valley moments throughout life. We are never ready for them. They arrive unannounced changing us in irreversible ways. But there is one thing they all have in common. They demand that we be silent and listen. These moments have something to say to us, to teach us.

But too often our response is like that of Peter, babbling absurdities because we cannot understand the significant, the meaningful moment. When Peter does finally quit talking nonsense a cloud appears, envelopes them, and the voice of God gives this instruction to Peter, James, and John: “This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to Him!” That’s it. Very short. To the point. What Peter said made no sense. What God said had a mountain of meaning. I would like to spend a few moments this morning unpacking the meaning of it:

1. This is my Son.
2. Whom I love, and am fully pleased with.
3. Listen to Him.

1. This is my Son.

God spoke from a bright cloud that came over the disciples (not a dark cloud a bright cloud, just as a cloud had led God’s people when they were lost in the wilderness and didn’t know what was ahead. At other times a cloud was the visible sign of the presence of God). There are times in our life when we are lost and / or we don’t know what lays ahead for us. In those incomprehensible moments of life if we were to stop talking, stop worrying, stop trying to figure how we can fix it or explain it, stop being angry and bitter and if we could hear God, He would say, “This is my Son.” When God the Father said, “This is My Son,” He was letting Peter, James and John know that there was One with them that was more important than Moses or Elijah. For Jesus is more than a leader, more than a prophet, He is truly the Son of God. When Jesus’ appearance changed so that His face shone like the sun, and His clothing became dazzling white, it was a revelation of the glory and power He had in heaven before He came to earth, a glory He would have again after His resurrection from the dead. Jesus was not just a man, He is also God and so He lives forever to be with us, especially in our time of need. [Harry N. Huxhold, *Which Way to Jesus?*, CSS Publishing Company, 1996.] “Jesus transcends culture in such a way that he is able to belong to each age and to address the issues of all time.” Jesus it not merely someone who lived 2000 years ago, He is someone who is relevant to our lives today and to the issues we face today. His face shone like the sun, and His clothing became dazzling white, because God is light and Jesus is God the Son and light shines in the darkness. God wants you to know He is always present and He especially wants you to know *that* in times of trouble in your life. He wants you to consider and look to Jesus because Jesus is His beloved Son. This is my Son...

2. Whom I love, and am fully pleased with.

God was not always pleased with Moses; God was not always pleased with Elijah; But Jesus is the beloved Son and with Him the Father was fully pleased. The Father is pleased with Jesus because it was Jesus who went to the Cross. Jesus alone can forgive our sins and give us a personal relationship with God. He alone is the Savior, the Messiah the Christ. 2 Cor 5:19 “For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people’s sins against them. This is the wonderful message he has given us to tell others.” God wants us to know the Son He loves because it is through

Jesus that we are reconciled to God, through Jesus the presence of God is with us and in us, through Jesus we have grace, help, peace and eternal hope. This is why He says...

3. Listen to Him.

When our parents said, "you better listen to me!" We knew what they meant, "you better do what your told to do!" God will be please with us not if we merely know these things about Jesus. God wants us to listen to Jesus. To listen means to obey. To have faith is not to hear only but to obey, hear Jesus, listen and obey Him. We need to hear God to obey God and have hope.

(I would not be so hard on Peter) I would hate to (know) how many times I have interrupt people in conversation and how many times I jumped ahead with my thoughts expressing the wrong conclusion to someone else's words.

We miss so much in life because we will not listen.

Writer Charles Swindoll once found himself with too many commitments in too few days. He got nervous and tense about it.

"I was snapping at my wife and our children, choking down my food at mealtimes, and feeling irritated at those unexpected interruptions through the day," he recalled in his book *Stress Fractures*. "Before long, things around our home started reflecting the patter of my hurry-up style. It was become unbearable.

"I distinctly remember after supper one evening, the words of our younger daughter, Colleen. She wanted to tell me something important that had happened to her at school that day. She began hurriedly, 'Daddy, I wanna tell you somethin' and I'll tell you really fast.'

"Suddenly realizing her frustration, I answered, 'Honey, you can tell me - and you don't have to tell me really fast. Say it slowly.'

"I'll never forget her answer: 'Then listen slowly.'"

[Brett Blair, www.eSemrons.com February 2005. Adapted from: *Bits & Pieces*, June 24, 1993, Page 13-14]

We need to take time to listen to Jesus.

Among the apostles, the one absolutely stunning success was Judas, and the one thoroughly groveling failure was Peter. Judas was a success in the ways that most impress us: he was successful both financially and politically. He cleverly arranged to control the money of the apostolic band; he skillfully manipulated the political forces of the day to accomplish his goal. And Peter was a failure in ways that we most dread: he was impotent in a crisis and socially inept. At the arrest of Jesus he collapsed, a hapless,

blustering coward; in the most critical situations of his life with Jesus, the confession on the road to Caesarea Philippi and the vision on the Mount of transfiguration, he said the most embarrassingly inappropriate things. He was not the companion we would want with us in time of danger, and he was not the kind of person we would feel comfortable with at a social occasion.

Time, of course, has reversed our judgments on the two men. Judas is now a byword for betrayal, and Peter is one of the most honored names in the church and in the world. Judas is a villain; Peter is a saint. Yet the world continues to chase after the successes of Judas, financial wealth and political power, and to defend itself against the failures of Peter, impotence and ineptness.

[Eugene Petersen quoted in: Tim Kimmel, Little House on the Freeway, Page 191-192.]

Listen to Jesus. Seek Him and His will. And in those incomprehensible moments of life look to Him.

This week on Prime Time Live there was an interview with a young woman who had it all at one time. Petra Nemcova, had a successful career as a model, making lots of money and had a boyfriend who loved her very much. She suggested to her boyfriend that they get away to a beautiful vacation resort in Thailand. They were there when Thailand was hit by the Tsunami. Earlier this week her boyfriend, a British fashion photographer, body was found.

The powerful wave flooded the bungalow they were in and pulled them outside the bungalow in seconds. Debris in the water crushed her pelvis. She had no use of her legs only her arms. She saw her boyfriend swept away. Rolls and rolls of dark water swirled around her. She swallowed the black water and thought she would drown. But she suddenly got her head above water. She said she remembered how happy she was to see the blue sky again. She moved toward a partially submerged palm tree and clung to it. She couldn't use her legs but she was able to cling to that palm tree until she was found, and rescued. When she saw the blue sky and got to that palm tree she could have said, "Lord, this is wonderful! It is good ... to be here."

When Jesus took Peter, James and John with Him, He took them out of the dark valleys of this world and up to a high place, a mountaintop, where their eyes would squint at the bright light of the Son of God, who would be transformed before their wondering eyes. It was good that they were there to view this special revelation of God.

[Staff, www.esermons.com, February 2005.]

"Whether you know it or not, you are a child of God, loved and upheld by the grace of God in Jesus Christ."