

Canterbury United Methodist Church
New Traditions/Traditional Worship
February 19, 2012

Text: Mark 9: 2-9

Focus: The Transfiguration of Jesus is an occasion where our world and God's world met, visible only to a few. Its effect is to single Jesus out as the sole

Function: Point to Stop Hunger Now as a visible representation of what it means to listen to Him.

Prayer: Great and gracious God, who speaks to us from the tops of mountains and the bottoms of valleys, we hear your call to "Listen to Him." Grant us strength and courage to follow faithfully, what we hear Jesus say to us. In his name we pray, amen.

Listen to Him

The name of the mountain is Hermon. It is the highest point in Israel, located in the far north of the country, straddling the border between Syria and Lebanon. It stands over 9,000 feet tall, about four times the size of our Mount Cheaha. It is a huge, hulking mountain and on the day we came close to it in Israel last May, its peak was still covered in snow. Because of its proximity to the village of Caesarea Philippi, Mount Hermon is thought to be the site of the Transfiguration. Today is Transfiguration Sunday.

Transfiguration Sunday is a bit of a crossroads. Today is the last Sunday of the season of Epiphany, the time in the liturgical year in which Jesus' identity is established. The season of Lent begins next week with Ash Wednesday, and

it will be downhill from here toward Jesus' time of trial, death by crucifixion, and ultimately, his resurrection. Things are about to change rapidly.

You know this story well: In our text this morning, Jesus selects three disciples...Peter, James, and John and climbs with them to the top of the mountain, where his appearance changes dramatically. Mark describes it as "his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them" which was to say that they were a color not from this world. And as that was happening, Moses and Elijah appear alongside Jesus and begin to talk with him. And the three disciples' reaction to this glimpse into another world was to be terrified. Not knowing what to say or do, Peter speaks up and asks Jesus if it would be a good idea to build three dwelling places for him, and Moses, and Elijah to stay at the top of the mountain. Jesus doesn't respond to this, but God does...saying "This is my Son, the Beloved, listen to him." And then, suddenly, they were alone with Jesus at the top of the mountain.

What can I say to you this morning about this event where God poked his finger into our world? What are we to make of this theophany...this occasion where God's world became visible in ours?

I could tell you that for first century readers, climbing the mountain at Hermon would have raised echoes of long ago stories of Moses on Sinai, another occasion where God's presence was visible. I could tell you that Bible scholars see the presence of Moses and Elijah as a way to link Jesus with these

heroes of the Jewish faith, but that their sudden disappearance leaving Jesus standing alone was God's way of saying that Jesus above all others is the sole manifestation of God's presence on earth. I could tell you that New Testament scholars see Jesus' dazzling white clothes foreshadowing the messengers who will ultimately declare his resurrection from an empty tomb. I could tell you that Peter's idea to build houses for Jesus, Moses and Elijah was a recognizable human character trait where, when faced with a situation that is so good, we want to hold onto it and keep it from changing. Once in the middle of a mountaintop experience, we want to stay instead of going back down.

But, it seems to me that we might take another meaning from the story of this theophany. This is not the first time we hear God's voice in the gospel of Mark...we heard it before back in the first chapter, in the story of Jesus' baptism. As Jesus rose from the waters, those present heard a voice from heaven say, "You are my Son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased." God's voice then was establishing Jesus' identity, but in that case the words were directed to Jesus..."You are my Son". On the mountaintop, the words were "This is my Son"...on the mountaintop, the words were directed, not to Jesus, but to Peter and James and John...and ultimately to all of us. And then comes the directive: "Listen to him."

I think that's pretty good advice for those of us who strive to be disciples of Jesus today. Listen to him. Listen to what he says...watch where he goes...follow him down the mountain into service to others.

It's an interesting thing: if you look up the definition of the word transfiguration, its meaning comes not from the secular but from the sacred. Our word transfiguration has two meanings. The first is to undergo a striking change in appearance, and the second is the act of transforming so as to exalt or glorify. Both meanings point back to this event on Mount Hermon, where God poked through into our world to give us a little glimpse into the next, and in so doing, changed how we see things.

I think there was an occasion of transformation this week at Canterbury. For several weeks, we've been telling you about Stop Hunger Now, the outreach event where we were coming together to pack 500,000 meals for the children of Haiti. It was like the event last year where we packed 143,000 meals in one day....but this time, because we were joining forces with four other churches, we would try to do half a million in two days.

Let me tell you what I saw...I saw Canterbury Hall, which was our original sanctuary here, transformed into a beehive of activity oriented toward service to others. Sacks of rice and nutrients were piled high on the stage...rows of tables were organized into sections for filling meal packets leading to other stations where the packets were weighed and sealed...which

lead to other stations where the meals were boxed and loaded onto pallets. I saw Canterburians standing shoulder to shoulder with friends from St. Luke's and Brookwood Baptist, and Highlands. I saw wide-eyed four year olds carrying trays of meal packets to grandparents who sealed them up. I worked with a precious young girl who lovingly patted each packet of rice as she laid them down on the packing squares. I packed boxes with a Canterburyian who told me, "I sure wish I could be there when these boxes get opened!" I heard the workers cheer with delight every time the gong signaled that another 1,000 meals had been packed.

Finally, over the course of two days, the gong sounded 500 hundred times, and by a little after 8:00 Thursday night...500,124 meals were on their way to Mobile to be loaded onto a cargo ship, where they are right now on their way to Haiti. And in about three weeks, those boxes will be opened and the meals that you packed in Canterbury Hall will help a young child go to bed full, instead of hungry.

I want to say that what we saw and what we felt in Canterbury Hall this week, as over 3,000 of us became a pumping engine of service, working together to help others...that all of us have seen a transformation and felt the warmth of what it feels like to give ourselves in service to others. I think that warmth is what happens when we "listen to him."

Amen. And amen.