

"The Power of the Word"

Exodus 24:12-18, 2 Peter 1:16-21, Matthew 17:1-9

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"WORDS." As you listened to not one, not two, but THREE different Bible passages this morning, you may have thought, 'Wow. This is a LOT of words. I'll bet the preacher is, likewise, going to have a LOT of words to say about all these!' But as I read over the OT, Gospel, and Epistle readings for this "Transfiguration Sunday," there was such a clear common thread between the three that I found it difficult to exclude any of them. They each communicate the power of God's WORD... words **spoken** to the people, and **written** for the people... as well as the 'Word made flesh' in the Father's only begotten Son, Jesus the Messiah. That just as Jesus was changed, 'transfigured' by the power of God's Word, SO TOO ARE WE! The WORD... both Written and Incarnate... brings guidance (Exod), truth about Jesus' identity (2 Peter), and peace, reassurance (Matthew). The power of what Christ says and does gives us strength to carry on in our everyday lives long after we leave the mountaintop for our lives down in the valleys. In the words of a modern hymn (LC last week), "Ancient words, ever true, they're changing me, changing you. We come with open hearts, O let the ancient words impart..."

Let's start with the oldest example of God's transformative power, the Exodus passage. God tells Moses to ***"Come up to me on the mountain, and wait there; and I will give you the tablets of stone, with the law and the commandment, which I have written for their instruction."*** (Exod 24:12) A faithful seeker of God's truth receives the command to 'come and follow me.' Hmm... like Father, like Son...

Now, these 'stone tablets' with the 'law and commandment' are not to be confused with the original ones. Moses received those back in Chapter 20. While we don't know exactly what was contained here, they could be considered like 'amendments' to the original 'constitution.' A NEW 'Bill of Rights' for mankind? Regardless, they are clearly important. After a six day 'waiting period' in a 'cloud,' Moses was then ushered into the presence of God, whose glory is described as ***"a devouring fire on the top of the mountain, in the sight of the people of Israel."*** (Ex. 24:17) The Hebrew refers to this as the *"Shekinah glory"*... the "continuing presence of God." Where Moses remained for 40 days and 40 nights.

FORTY DAYS! Many of us have a hard enough time staying in the 'presence of God' in worship or study for forty MINUTES! Of course, Moses was no average 'God follower.' He reminds us of the importance of listening for God's call to pay attention to that which has been 'written for our instruction.' And to give thought to how readily we spend time in the 'continuing presence of God'... pondering 'the power of the Word.'

Which brings us to the 'power of the Word'... made flesh... that was exhibited on the mountaintop with some other faithful followers: Peter, James and John. Where they heeded Jesus' call to follow him, in order to learn more about his 'person and purpose'... Who He was and Why He came. There they saw Elijah and Moses, both of whom represented ties with the historic faith of the Jews in the One true God of Israel. They went up that mountain not knowing what lie ahead, but they proceeded in faith with a strong sense of EXPECTATION.

They *expected* to be blessed, enlightened... transformed. Or, in another word for today, **transfigured**. Which means, according the Webster's gospel, "*to be given a new and typically exalted/spiritual appearance.*" A 'metamorphosis,' if you will, a 'transformation' in which 'the old is made new.'

Jesus surely underwent a 'transformation'... in which his ***"face shone like the sun, and his clothes became a dazzling white."*** (Matt. 17:2) Which, amazingly to ME, is that the disciples seemed to be just fine with this 'eye-catching' experience. Even when those two 'hall of famers' in the faith appeared, 'Mo' and Elijah, the first thing that Peter says is how ***"it is good for us to be here,"*** and if Jesus would like them to build a 'dwelling,' a 'tent' or 'sanctuary' for the three esteemed faith leaders. It is only when they hear the voice of God calling out to them, ***"This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased' listen to him!"*** (Matt 17:5) that they fall to the ground, trembling in fear.

How does all this communicate to US the 'power of the Word?' Well, for one, those first disciples followed Jesus into this new and unknown experience not knowing what would happen... but with a strong sense of **expectation** to be **blessed, enlightened, CHANGED**. The very same attitude WE ourselves should enter WORSHIP every Sunday (or other days). The same way we should enter into times of STUDY, or PRAYER. With a confidence that God IS going to speak to us, either directly through a soft still voice in our minds, or speak to us indirectly through

his Written word. And in the life of the Incarnate Word, Jesus. Like Peter, we should be able to say, "it is good for us to be here."

This 'transfiguring' experience is important because of what lies ahead for our Savior. His suffering, his persecution, and his execution that we will be reminded of in this upcoming Lenten season. As we remember the pain he endured on our behalf... and the sinful natures of our own that are no different than the ones who nailed him to a cross... we must hold that 'present darkness' of ours up the 'dazzling light' of a future with our loving, forgiving God. The God who proclaims just who Jesus is: a beloved Son, of whom He is pleased, to whom we must listen. The Jesus through whom we always have HOPE, and a FUTURE.

And even when we want to give up on that hope... even when we fall to the ground, trembling in fear before God... Jesus is there to come and touch us, gently saying to us, "**Get up and do not be afraid.**" (Matt 17:7) As we trust in Him to get up, to not fear, to keep on climbing that mountain in obedience to God's Word, we will grow in our belief that God's proclamation about Jesus applies to us as well: **we are loved**. There is much about us with which **God is pleased**. And we must continue to 'listen to him.' In order to better know 'the power of the Word' to change that which does NOT please God...

In seeking to fulfill the Father's command to 'listen to Him,' His Beloved Son, it brings me to our reading from 1 Peter. Which speaks of two 'tools' that we are to employ to fulfill Jesus' promise in John 14:26: "**The Holy Spirit will teach you and remind you of everything I have said to you.**" Two 'tools' that start with the letter 'T': **Testaments** and **Testimonies**. 'Testaments'... as in 'New' and 'Old'... i.e. the B-I-B-L-E. For me the important takeaway concerning the validity 'and truth of Scripture are the statements at the beginning and end of this passage: "**We did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ**"... (and that) **First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy in scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.**" (2 Peter 1:16, 20-21)

The absolute best source we have in seeking to understand the will of God as lived out by Jesus is right here... **[hold up Bible]** the best-selling book in the history of mankind. And do not let ANYONE try to convince you that THIS is some 'cleverly devised myth.' Believers through the

centuries have attested to its singular and unequivocal trustworthiness to be our 'rule of faith and life'... perhaps no better stated that in the Westminster Confession of Faith: *"The authority of Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed and obeyed, does not depend upon the testimony of any man or church, but wholly upon God (who is truth itself), the author thereof... it IS the Word of God."* (WCF, Ch. 1.4) In those words of Peter, the Scriptures were written by ***"men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoken from God."***

Which brings me to the other 'T,' **Testimonies**. Unlike all but TWO of his contemporaries Peter was able to speak as an eyewitness. We, however, would be hard-pressed to say that ***"we ourselves heard this voice from heaven, while we were with him on the holy mountain."*** (2 Pet 1:18) How can we bear witness to the living presence of God... Father, Son, Spirit?

Aside from any personal revelation you might have had with the Almighty... and if so, PLEASE share 😊... I believe that perhaps the greatest testimony we can give comes by witnessing God at work in one another. To surround yourself with, and engage with, fellow believers who are themselves 'the living presence of God.' Sharing with one another how God is at work in our everyday lives.

I personally have been SO blessed this week by many different opportunities to share with fellow believers. Starting Monday with Session meeting (here) at the LC Church. (Yes, God is even present at SESSION meetings!) From worship to outreach to prayers, I believe that the Holy Spirit was/is certainly our 'silent partner' in ministry... And then, from Tuesday's great cloud of witnesses at the Presbytery meeting at Jefferson Pres. In N.O., to my precious Reading Buddies at Oak Park and Fairview on Wednesday, to our Men's study at Southern Spice on Thursday, the 'joy of the Lord' was evident in all of God's children... young and 'not-so-young.' This busy yet beautiful week was perfectly capped off by the Candlelight Prayer and Praise event with the Amish/Mennonite 'missionaries' who have so faithfully served to 'transform' our communities from brokenness to wholeness. Both those gathered to thank them as well as those 'craftsmen of compassion' shared their testimonies of how God was working through them. All of these were 'inspired' reminders of the Power of the Word... both Incarnate and Written... alive and well in God's beautiful children.

On this Transfiguration Sunday, in which Jesus' identity as the Son of an Almighty, all-powerful and all-loving God will stand in stark contrast to the betrayal, brutality, and brokenness of the 'Season of Suffering' about to begin,

I would leave you with a final 'testimony' from one of those devotional books I choose from each week for "Where's Willis." (and there are still 'front row seats' available!)

Chris Keating is pastor at Woodlawn Chapel Pres. Church in St. Louis, as well as a chaplain for the St. Louis County police department. In speaking of how this past Tuesday's Valentine's Day is all about **remembering**... remembering the love we have for those still with us, as well as those who have left. Keating likens the Transfiguration also to a time to remember how much God loves us, can be proud of us, and implores us to listen to His Son. He ends by saying that *"Memories, of course, are slippery. In time, even our most precious memories may fade like photographs. But the confidence of FAITH does not erode. We might forget our keys 😊, but we must never forget our essential identity as God's beloved (child)."*

And when you ever need a reminder that you are a 'beautiful, wonderful, beloved child of God,' just take hold of "the power of God's Word." The Word [**hold up Bible**] ... and The Word [**motion heavenward**]. The One who comes to touch you, and me, when we have fallen and paralyzed by fear, and says, **"Get up, and don't be afraid."** To God and God alone be all *Shekinah* glory and honor, wisdom and power, this day and forevermore, AMEN!

CHARGE: Often we just don't FEEL God's Power and presence. Can feel ALONE.

Like perhaps Moses did as He went into the cloud on Mt. Sinai. Here's a closing thought from Rev. Keating:

*"It is not hard imagining that **Moses panics** a bit when he enters the cloud. This is not just a personal prayer time with God; it is a time of transformation. No one leaves the presence of God unchanged. Once inside the cloud, he sees the **glory of God dancing on the earth**. It's terrifying, but also reassuring. He discovers that he has never been alone."*

"No one leaves the presence of God unchanged." Change can be terrifying. Especially when God is involved. But as we call on the **power of the Word**... Written and Incarnate... may we rest assured that God is with us... **dancing in glory**. And that **we are never alone**. As we go out into the world... by the power of God's Word... 'dancing in glory'... we KNOW that 'we do not go alone'...

Question for Reflection: Why does Jesus instruct the disciples to keep quiet about what they had seen “until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead” (Matt. 17:9)?