

Last week, I had the privilege of looking Charlotte Lavelle and Adam Lavelle in the eye, and saying these sacred words,

“At this very moment, and at every moment in time, God’s spirit, God’s breath, is with you, for you too are a precious child of God who is loved and blessed.”

The reason I say this at each baptism is because our scriptures tell us that when Jesus was baptized, God came down from the heavens and told him, *“You are my child, my beloved, in you I am well pleased.”*

In today’s text, God says something similar, but the audience is different.

At his Baptism, God is talking directly to Jesus.

It feels as if we are listening in on an intimate, private conversation.

God tells Jesus just who he is, God’s beloved child.

In today’s text, God says, *“This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!”*

God isn’t talking to Jesus anymore.

This time, God is speaking to the disciples who are up on the mountain with Jesus, specifically Peter, James and John.

Since these words were recoded in our holy texts, God is also speaking to us, Jesus’ modern-day disciples.

Now, God is being awfully demanding here, and I can't help but speculate that the disciples must not have been listening to Jesus.

I mean, you don't demand that someone listen to you, or listen to someone else, if they are already listening attentively.

So why does God suspect that the disciples haven't been listening to Jesus?

Well, let's take a walk through the Gospel of Mark to see what's happened recently between Jesus and the disciples.

While Jesus is walking with his disciples, he casually asks them,

'Who do people say that I am?'

They respond to him and they tell him, well, people think you're John the Baptist, Elijah and 'one of the prophets.'

Then Jesus asks them, "But who do you say that I am?"

Peter answers him, 'You are the Messiah.' (Mark 8: 27-29)

So that's a hopeful sign, Peter gave the right answer.

At this point we might think that Peter has been listening to, and understanding, what Jesus has been teaching them.

He may have been listening, but I am not sure that he fully understands.

Here's why... shortly after this, Jesus tells his disciples that

“the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.” (Mark 8: 31)

But Peter didn't like this.

He didn't want the Messiah to undergo great suffering.

The Messiah was supposed to save them in power and might from their oppression.

Peter was probably envisioning the post of honor he'd occupy when Jesus brought in his kingdom by chasing out the Romans and re-establishing the idyllic days of David and Solomon.

Instead, Jesus says that he will suffer and die.

Peter doesn't like this and so he rebukes Jesus.

He says shhhh, you're ruining our dreams and our visions.

You will conquer the Romans and rule over Israel.

But Jesus gets angry that Peter doesn't understand and he says, *“Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”* (Mark 8: 33)

So, now we really see that Peter isn't listening to Jesus.

He is hearing what he wants to hear and when he hears something he doesn't like, he changes it.

That's not faithful listening, it's selective listening and God has no time for it.

Because selective listening means that the disciples aren't taking Jesus, or their call to follow him, seriously.

Spreading the Gospel Message is life-saving business, and the opportunity can't be squandered because some disciples are shortsighted.

So, hoping that Peter got the message that time, Jesus continues with some more teachings, which turn their world upside down.

He tells his disciples, *“If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”*³⁵ *For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.”* (Mark 8: 34-35)

We don't know exactly what happened, but presumably something happened after Jesus said this, which caused him and God to need to do something drastic.

The text says that 6 days after he said that, he took Peter, James and John up to the mountain and was transfigured before them, which is the story that we heard this morning.

I would venture to guess that during those 6 days, the disciples (especially Peter) expressed hesitation, confusion or flat-out disagreement with Jesus' teachings,

and so, together, Jesus and God decided they had to do something so unequivocally miraculous which would prevent the disciples from questioning Jesus again.

His charismatic teaching and preaching and healing just wasn't cutting it.

They had to do something spell-binding, so, we have the scene where Jesus literally transforms right before their very eyes.

He becomes such a dazzling white, whiter than all the bleach in the world.

Blinding white.

So, we have the visual spectacle, but then we have Elijah and Moses as well.

Elijah and Moses were two of the most important figures in Judaism.

Elijah represented the prophets and Moses represented the law.

These patriarchs were pillars of the Jewish faith.

Having them amongst Jesus sent the message to the disciples that Jesus was on their level.

He was as important as these guys were.

Take Jesus as seriously as you would Elijah or Moses, he embodies the power and influence that both of them had.

In other words, stick with Jesus, and you are on the right path.

But Peter still doesn't get it.

He is so terrified that he just becomes flustered and confused in the moment, because he starts talking nonsense.

He tells Jesus that they should set up dwellings for Jesus, Elijah and Moses and they should stay up on that mountain and hang out.

I think that after the Satan comment, and after not understanding the transfiguration or why Elijah and Moses are there, God has had enough of Peter.

And so God's voice booms down, saying simply, *"This is my Son, the Beloved; LISTEN TO HIM!"*

Sometimes we have to be direct with people who are a little dense, and that's what Goes does here with Peter.

There's no room for misinterpretation.

Just listen to him.

The problem is that listening is often easier said than done.

How many of us have selective hearing?

Or only stop talking long enough to think about what we want to say next?

Or how often do our minds wander to other things when someone is talking to us?

I think part of our inability to listen comes from the fact that we have become a visual people.

There are graphics, pictures and movies everywhere.

People want images, not words.

Our attention span for words is short, which is why Twitter has become popular.

But we love pictures, which is why Instagram has also become popular.

We also associate seeing with believing.

You know the phrase, "I'll believe it when I see it."

We want to see evidence, we call people eye-witnesses who saw something with their own eyes.

But maybe God turned Jesus' clothes a dazzling, blinding white because we aren't meant to see.

God clouded our vision.

It's like when you look at the white snow on a sunny day, the white can hurt your eyes.

If you look at it for too long, you can experience snow blindness.

In this story, we often focus on the dazzling visual of seeing Jesus and what that must have been like, but I think that by focusing on seeing, we are missing the main point.

God doesn't want us to see.

God wants us to hear. Listen.

Because when we listen, truly listen, we follow.

When we listen, the words change our thoughts and they soften our hearts and they influence our actions.

Professing belief in Jesus is not enough.

Glorifying Jesus is not enough.

Believing and glorifying, in themselves, don't change our actions.

They make for nice words and thoughts, but it's when we actually listen to Jesus, that our souls are transformed.

The problem is that in this day and age, it's really hard to listen for what God is saying to us in our lives.

We fill our heads with so much information all the time, from the tv, to the radio, to music and podcasts from our cellphones, to all the videos we watch online.

It's information overload and there's no space for us to hear God amidst the cacophony of other noises and ideas being downloaded into our brains.

God speaks loudest in the silence.

The problem is that we are rarely silent.

Pay attention to when you are truly in silence with no background noise, I would imagine those moments are precious few.

But the church is here to help with that.

During Lent, starting next Sunday, we are going to have more silence built into the worship service.

It will be a chance for us to settle in, get more comfortable with silence and stillness.

It also will hopefully clear some space in our minds and hearts for us to hear God, or hear how Jesus is calling us to live and exist in this world.

After all, God simply said, "Listen to him." Amen.