

## 27 February 2022, Luke 9:28-36, Transfiguration, Pastor Fraser Pearce

Today I'll start with two verses from the Gospel reading  
One from the start, one from almost the end.

Here's the verse at the start:

**Now about eight days *after these sayings* Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray.**

Literally: *eight days after these words...*

Eight days after what sayings? After what words?

Well, we're going to come back to this.

Now listen to this key verse from almost the end of the reading:

**Then from the cloud came a voice that said, 'This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!'**

The voice of the Father instructs us to listen to his son

So again, what has he been saying to his disciples?

And what does he say to us today?

In this sermon I'll go back to the words that Jesus said to his disciples

Before he was transfigured in glory before Peter, James, and John.

Then I'll draw your attention to how Jesus speaks to us today

As we gather together as his people here at Bethlehem.

I'll proclaim the Good News

That as we listen to Jesus the Father fills us with his Spirit,

So that we may follow our Lord on the path to discipleship,

So that we may be saved.

Just a brief comment before I go on:

Every year we hear the account of the transfiguration

From the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, or Luke,

And these accounts all follow the same pattern,

And fall into the same context in the narrative flow of the Gospels,

Although there are significant variations in the details.

Every year we also hear the account of the transfiguration

On the Sunday before Ash Wednesday.

On the Sunday before the beginning of Lent.

In other words, as a church, based on the Scriptures,

And as we arrange the church year,

We see that there is a connection between Christ revealed in his glory,

And the path to the cross that he took for us; we see that

The glory of Christ and the cross of Christ belong together.

So you could say that the account of the transfiguration

Helps us to prepare for our Lenten journey,

Where we as a community recognise that a key part of discipleship

Is denying ourselves, taking up our cross every day,

And following Jesus.

Now again in today's reading the Father tells us to listen

To his chosen son.

And we know that his Son has been giving his words to his disciples.

We might think that if we are to listen to Jesus

Then it must mean that Jesus has been telling his disciples

To do something: that we primarily listen to *obey*.

Of course, obedience to Jesus is a core part of Christian discipleship,

But listen to how Jesus speaks to his disciples

Before he is revealed in glory: **Once when Jesus was praying alone, with only the disciples near him, he asked them, 'Who do the crowds say that I am?' They answered, 'John the Baptist; but others, Elijah; and still others, that one of the ancient prophets has arisen.' He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Peter answered, 'The Messiah of God.'**

So, the first words that Jesus says are not commands,

They are not even promises: they are questions:

**Who do the crowds say that I am?**

And, more pointedly, **who do you say that I am?**

So, we could say from the way that the Gospel unfolds

That to listen to Jesus'

Is to listen to him ask us, who do you say that I am?

I'll say that again a different way:

From Scripture we know that the Father wants us *to listen* to Jesus,

And this means to listen to Jesus *ask us who we say that he is*.

The question that Jesus asks us about his identity

Is one that we answer to him individually in our hearts.

There is something intensely personal and even private about this,

And it's something that we work out

As we grow on the path of faith.

But the question of Jesus' identity

Is also one that we answer together as a congregation.

We confess our faith in the Lord Jesus,

And therefore our faith in the Triune God,

As week by week we stand together and confess the faith,

As we do today especially as we welcome a brother or sister

Through baptism into Christ.

Now after Jesus asks the question of his disciples

He does give a command,

But a strange command that is connected to his description

Of what it means for him to be the Messiah.

Listen: **[Jesus] sternly ordered and commanded [his disciples] not to tell anyone, saying, 'The Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.'**

Jesus here begins to unpack for his disciples

What it means for him to be the Messiah:

The anointed one of God is not going to Jerusalem

To kick the Romans out, and to set up a new worldly kingdom.

Rather he is going into his suffering, death, and resurrection.  
He is indeed going on the path to glory  
But the path to glory is the path of suffering and the cross,  
Before it is the path of resurrection and life.

This is what Jesus then goes on to tell his disciples  
That following him to glory  
Means following him on the path to the cross.

This is how the text goes on: **Then he said to them all, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it.**

If we hold on to our lives:  
To our self-constructed identities,  
To our own version of glory,  
We will lose our lives.

Let's today think of one significant instance of this sort of thing.  
Let's suppose we are sinned against,  
That we really are the victim of someone's ill-will toward us,  
Just as Jesus was.

It can become very easy for us to hang on to our victim status,  
To let it define who we are.

We can even take a perverse sense of joy  
In thinking how we are better than those who have sinned against us,  
And how we will take our revenge on them,  
If not in our actions or our words, then in our thoughts.

Jesus gives us a warning: if we hold on to this, we will lose our lives,  
Here, now, in this life, and in the life to come.

It's in letting go of things like our bitterness, resentment, and pride,  
And doing this day by day, that we take up of cross and follow Christ.  
Where we get the power, the strength to do this,  
Is something that we'll come back to at the end of this sermon.

Jesus makes his point about self-denial and taking up the cross  
More strongly as he goes on: **What does it profit them if they gain the whole world, but lose or forfeit themselves?**

Even if we get everything we hope for in this world  
By hanging on tightly to our own lives,  
What is the real gain for our souls, for our true identity,  
For who we are?

Our true identity can be found ultimately only in Christ Jesus,  
Who now in the reading brings his disciples, brings us,  
Back to the question of who he is: **Those who are ashamed of me and of my words, of them the Son of Man will be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.**

The human community is not the only community that counts:  
There is the glorious and lasting community  
Of the Lord and the holy angels,

And it is in confessing Christ before the world,  
That we show where we truly belong.

Jesus then ends with these words: **But truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God.'**

It's directly after this, eight days after these words,  
That Jesus is then revealed in glory in the transfiguration,  
To Peter, John, and James,  
That he is revealed in glory,  
As he is on the path to the cross.

We've listened today to the words that Jesus spoke to his disciples,  
We've listened to Jesus, as the Father commanded.

But we know that Jesus also speaks his word to us  
As we gather together Sunday by Sunday.

So he speaks his word of forgiveness to us:

It is not Fraser Pearce who announces to the forgiveness of your sins,  
It is the Lord Jesus: his is the only one that has authority to forgive,  
And it is in his stead, and in his name, that your sins are forgiven.

When you hear the forgiveness of your sins, listen:

Listen to your Lord Jesus, trust him and what he says.

Your heavenly Father does not want you cowering in fear,

Or unable to challenge injustice,

Or trapped in bitterness toward those who have hurt you:

He wants to draw you close with his word of mercy,

To grow in understanding what is just and what is unjust,

And to free you to forgive others as you have been forgiven.

It is from Jesus, and through his word, that we receive the Holy Spirit,

That we receive power from God to let go of ourselves,

To take up our cross, and to follow on the path to the resurrection.

In the same way our Lord speaks to us in our baptism,  
Where through his name and the washing of water  
That we find our new identity as sons, as daughters of God.

In the same way our Lord speaks to us in his supper,  
Where he gives his word,

**This is my body given for you,**

**This is my blood shed for you, for the forgiveness of sins.**

We listen to Jesus as we hear his word,

As we come forward and eat and drink,

And as we trust that in this very eating and drinking

We receive from God exactly what our Lord promises:

The forgiveness of sins.

May God our Father always give us his Holy Spirit,

So that we may listen to Jesus,

So that we may free to deny ourselves,

Take up our cross,

And follow Jesus through death to the resurrected life.

In Jesus' name. Amen.