

Humility Factor, Week 2 – Listen March 16, 17 2019

Today's the second Sunday of Lent, and to celebrate this season, we are offering a message series that we're calling Humility Factor. If you missed the beginning of the series which started last weekend just go to our website and click on messages to catch up. To look more closely at this subject this evening/ morning, we're going to turn to the Gospel of Luke, where in the 9th chapter we read this, *Jesus took Peter, James, and John and went up the mountain to pray.* In the Bible, mountains are often associated as special places of prayer and encounter with God perhaps because they can be a reminder of God's greatness and grandeur.

This verse also reveals two very basic lessons about prayer. **First lesson**, we need time, we need a specific time for prayer. Jesus was quite specific and intentional about setting aside his prayer time, he made it a priority throughout his life. Same for us, unless we make prayer a priority by designating a specific time, it won't happen despite our best intentions.

Second lesson, - he shows that we need a place, we need a specific place where we can get away from the demands and the distractions of the world around us. Luke continues, *while he was praying, his face changed in appearance, his clothing became dazzling white and behold, two men were conversing with him.* Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his Exodus, **His exodus would be his crucifixion.** This incident is called the Transfiguration. While Jesus is praying, his inner glory is revealed. We know that Jesus was 100% human being just like us, but he was also God, 100% God. Throughout the course of his life, his glory was largely hidden from sight but here in this moment, and just for a moment, his glory burst forth as the Son of God, his divine nature is revealed. And this is given as a gift, a blessing to Peter, James and John to bolster their faith, to strengthen them for what was coming. In fact, years later, Peter would point to this moment as the transforming one in the course of his whole life.

Elsewhere, he eventually wrote, *we didn't follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power of the Lord Jesus, we were eyewitnesses to his majesty.* Peter believes in Jesus' majesty, he understands it, not because he's heard about it or because somebody told him about it, but because he witnessed it personally, he's seen it with his own eyes.

Back to the story, Luke tells us Peter and his companions had been overcome by sleep, but becoming fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him. If you've ever had trouble sometimes staying focused during prayer, or even staying awake, take heart, you're in good company.

Peter is twice recorded in the Bible as falling asleep during prayer in the presence of Jesus. Here, he wakes up from his sleep and sees Jesus bright with glory and Moses and Elijah, along with him, two towering figures of the Old Testament. Understandably, bewildered, Peter says, somewhat incoherently, **"It's good that we're here, let's make tents for you, and Moses and Elijah,"** but he didn't know what he was saying. Like any amazing experience, Peter doesn't want this one to end. But even as he's speaking, this whole scene becomes even more amazing. A cloud came and cast a shadow over them, and they became frightened when they entered the cloud, a voice that said, **"This is my chosen son, listen to him."** God's voice from heaven, quieting people... – for Peter, - overwhelming him, terrifying him. A mighty majestic scene but with quite a simple message, **"This is my chosen son, listen to him."**

Listen to him because his teaching and preaching his word, it seeds everything that has come before from Moses to Elijah, **so listen to him. To listen to him,** to do that requires, first of all, we've got to listen and that's not always easy to do, to listen means to hear, but to hear with attention, there's a difference there, to lend our attention, thoughtful attention to someone else, to attend closely, to heed, perhaps even to obey. It carries the connotation of engagement and relationship with another. Unfortunately, sometimes, we don't want to listen and sometimes we're afraid to.

If I listen, then I might have to change my mind and I've already made up my mind, I don't want to change my mind. **If I listen,** it might mean I have to admit that I was wrong and I'm never wrong. **If I listen,** I might have to acknowledge that I don't know something that I've been pretending all along to know. When we fail to listen, we fail to learn and in the process, we're failing to make progress as we could or should in emotional health, in intellectual growth, in spiritual growth.

Think how frustrating it is when someone won't listen to you and insists on only their side of the story, their point of view, their choice. Think how unattractive people who act like that can be. On the other hand, think how easily reconciliation is achieved. Friends are made, business is transacted - **when we do listen.** Think what a really loving act - **listening can be.** Of course, listening requires humility, it means humbling ourselves at least enough to recognize that on our own, we don't know how life works, at least not all of it, we don't know everything.

It takes humility to put aside my own self-importance, my own self-absorption, my own self-interest, to slow down and to listen to what somebody else might have to tell me or teach me. And a great place to learn to become a better listener is in prayer because prayer is not just talking to God, it's listening to Him, it's meant to be a conversation. When it comes to conversation, it's often said the wiser, the more knowledgeable, the more experienced person should do more of the talking. The less knowledgeable, the less experienced, the less wise should do more of the listening. And in any given conversation, if you're not sure which category you fall into, go with listening one.

When it comes to the person of Jesus Christ, we have the font of all wisdom, the source of all knowledge, the one through whom all things were made. So, it just makes sense that we will be availing ourselves of what he has to say.

But how to do it, how to apply this message?

Pick a time and a place this week when you're going to pray. It matters not at all how long that time is, it matters very much that you determine a specific time and place when it's going to happen, and determine, decide that part of that time will be devoted to listening. And the easiest way to start listening to Jesus that I know is to begin reading the Gospels. For some people, that sounds simple, but it could be a game changer, it could be more important than you actually realize.

And so with that in mind I would like to place a challenge before you during this Lent. And that challenge is to read just one of the 4 gospels - Matthew, Mark, Luke or John. Read one of them from beginning to end. Some of you who are in small groups may already be doing that. But for those of you who are not I encourage you to start today. There are people that have been going to church their whole life long and after reading the gospels discovered things that Jesus said and Jesus did that they never even heard before. Their faith and their relationship with Christ went to a whole new level simply by slowing down and listening to Jesus as he speaks to us in the gospels.

Along with that exercise, try this one this week also, ask yourself, **"Who else do I need to be listening to this week?"** Is there someone at home, at work, at school that you know is frustrated with you because you aren't listening to them? Maybe you could start to change that this week. Last year I and some of the staff visited an evangelical church for a conference. The conference was led by the very famous evangelical pastor and preacher Rick Warren who has written several books on a Purpose Driven Church.

Some of you may have read some of this works. Well this conference was totally out of my comfort zone. And I asked myself several times before going, what could Rick Warren a evangelical preacher of one of the fastest growing churches in the U.S. have to say to me, that I could learn from and take back to my ministry at Holy Eucharist? Well let me say he had plenty for me to think about and take back.

Listening to him I was totally inspired. Listening to him I was inspired to look deeper into my own life as a person and as a priest. Listening to him made me ask a lot of questions. Spending a few days with hundreds of Evangelical pastors was truly an interesting and engaging experience. For someone who was first closed minded about hearing his message - after truly listening and putting aside my ego, changed everything. It was Saint Augustine who once said, "There's something in humility which strangely exalts the human heart, and it all begins simply - by listening."