

Grace and peace to you my friends and fellow sojourners from Jesus Christ, Emmanuel, God with us.

Today is Transfiguration Sunday. Even that title sounds kind of **mystical** and the reading does nothing to dispel this idea of mysticism. But is the mystical element in the story what our focus **really** should be? I do not think so. In fact, I suspect this mystical realm is often justification for much of the minutia surrounding our many religious practices. So, how do I think we should respond to the mysticism in our lives? Why with context and facts.

This is the last Sunday before we enter the fourth season of **this** liturgical year – Lent. Now, I have told you before that we use three liturgical years; A, B, and C. I have also told you that we are currently in Year B, the year of Mark and John. During the four Sundays of the Season of Advent, we had 2 Sundays with readings from Mark. First from the thirteenth chapter of Mark and then from the first chapter of Mark. During the three Sundays of Christmas, we had one reading from the first chapter of Mark. Then in the five Sundays of the Time after Epiphany, we have had three readings from the first chapter of Mark and then today's reading from the ninth chapter of Mark. That means that for the twelve Sundays in the Year of Mark and John so far, we have had seven readings from Mark and one from John or seventy - five percent. Just in case you want to look ahead, the five Sundays in Lent have two readings from Mark and three from John.

There are two other ways to look at the context of Mark's gospel in greater detail. The first is to understand that in this gospel Jesus makes three significant predictions of Jesus' impending suffering, death, and resurrection. The first is in Mark 8:31 and is followed by Jesus discussing the **cost** of discipleship. The second is in Mark 9:30-31 which is followed by Jesus teaching about childlike **humility** and **servanthood**. And finally, the third one is in Mark 10:33-34 which is then followed by Jesus teaching that **true** greatness lies in **servicing**. These passion predictions in Mark underscore Jesus' sacrificial mission. It is in the **midst** of these predictions, between the first and second, that we have the Transfiguration moment in today's reading. And it is apparent that even now the disciples are apparently incapable of either accepting or understanding all that is happening around and in the life of Jesus and **their** lives as well. Do we have the same issue?

The other detailed context is to look at the gospel's storyline. It begins with the announcement that it is about the good news of Jesus the Messiah. Next comes the baptism of Jesus followed by the announcement that the reign of God is already at hand. Then Jesus calls some fisher folk who immediately respond to fish for people. These all **lead** up to a **dynamic** ministry of preaching and healing. The disciples have even already returned from their successful missions yet they still do not **really** get it, in fact, even what they have been getting seems to be regressing. Somehow, I believe we have this very same issue at times as well. Would you agree?

After all of this context, I bet you are wondering just exactly what does God and in this case, Ron, want me to get out of today's readings. Well, for me it is two simple words – love and listen. Clearly those two ideas come out loud and clear from God's words in verse seven of our gospel reading that says: "**Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, 'This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!'**" I hope you understand beloved is a term of endearment, a variation of love. And, of course, listen means listen. God is declaring relationship, and God said and did much the same thing when Jesus was baptized as God says now at the Transfiguration. Here is the thing, in a less than a sound theological critique, I suggest to you that for Jesus, baptism and transfiguration are very similar to if not equal to our baptism and confirmation process in the Lutheran church. Therefore, I am fully confident when I say to you that God has said the **same** words to you of love and listening at those very special times and even others in your life. After all, you are a child of God and an heir to the kingdom. What could be more thrilling and empowering than just believing in and acquiescing to God's love?

Both our psalm and our second reading from Second Corinthians refer to another simple word, seeing. Someone once said, "Seeing is believing." Do you believe that? Do you remember the story that we call "The Good Samaritan?" Do you remember **how** the first two religious leaders avoided the wounded individual? Well, having **observed** the individual, they chose to pass on the other side of the road so that they could avoid "**seeing**" the hurt individual. How often do we do the same or similar actions in our own lives? I know I do sometimes. Why?

So, I have now mentioned three words – listen, love, and see. All three of these are required to establish relationships. I have also said before that Jesus' two commandments are also about having relationships – love God and love others. Neither of these commandments are easy but they are important to God and should also be important to us.

I hope by now that you realize that I do often briefly comment on one or more of the other readings but that my focus is almost always on the gospel. I do this because of our reading today. God says to listen to Jesus. Yes, the Old Testament and the New Testament books beginning with Acts are the word of God, small "w". But Jesus is the word of God, big "W", and the only place purported to actually quote Jesus' words are the Gospels.

For the last two weeks and even very early in this homily, I have mentioned the concept of minutia that have impact on our faith and religious practices. This week I happened to come across a quote from Martin Luther that I believe is akin to what I have been trying to say. Martin said: "*My dear Pope, I will kiss your feet and acknowledge you as supreme bishop if you will worship my Christ and grant that through His death and resurrection, not through keeping your traditions, we have forgiveness of sins and life eternal.*"

Hear then the good news:

God **wants** to be in relationship with each of us.

God **calls** us to be in relationship with God and with each other.

How can we be in relationship? Well, I think by listening, loving, and seeing all, everyone, that is around us.

We often tend to exclude many around us from relationships because of their color, their religion, their speech habits, their economic status, and even because of previous failed interactions. I am sure you can name many more reasons for relationships failing or not even starting.

But, my friends, God calls us to be in relationship, not to make excuses.

Being in relationship is exactly how Jesus lived and interacted. We can too.

Do you remember why Jesus told the Parable of the Good Samaritan?

It was to answer the question – who is my neighbor?

Martin Luther's answer to the same question about neighbor was: "*My neighbour is every person, especially those who need my help, as Christ explained in the tenth chapter of Luke, even if a person has done me some wrong, or has hurt me in any way, he is still a human being with flesh and blood ... an object of our love.*"

We are in relationship when we listen, really listen; love, really love; and see, really see.

Do we fail – absolutely.

Will we continue to fail – absolutely.

But have no fear, you are **already** forgiven.

Not because of who you are or what you have done.

But because of who Jesus is and what Jesus has done.

Because of Jesus, God with us, you are forgiven, you are an heir to the kingdom.

Grace and peace to you my friends. This week listen, love, and see.

Amen