

Who's Listening?

Transfiguration Sunday

When Admiral Richard Byrd explored the South Pole, CBS had the contract to transmit over the airwaves all of the reports he made from his expedition. The world eagerly awaited the first radio broadcast from Antarctica. But something went wrong. Byrd's transmission began alright, but the quality of the reception rapidly deteriorated. Only one person possessed the necessary expertise to correct the problem. That person was an engineer named George. A frantic call was placed from CBS to George's home. But all they got was a busy signal! That's because George had accidentally left his phone off the hook. Well, someone at CBS had an idea! They radioed Byrd at the South Pole and instructed him to interrupt his broadcast to tell George, over the airwaves, to go and hang up his phone so CBS could get through to him and have him solve the technical difficulty. I'm sure George, as he was listening at home to Admiral Byrd's broadcast, was shocked to hear the explorer stop his report and suddenly begin speaking personally to George. But it worked. George hung up the phone and called the studio with a fix for the problem. At last, the world was able to hear Byrd's report with clarity. But only because the shortest distance between George and CBS was by way of a voice from the South Pole!

The Transfiguration is also an epic tale of overcoming a communication gap. Jesus had brought his closest three disciples up a mountain with him. There Jesus is "transfigured"; in a way that reveals his glory to the disciples. His face and clothes shine like the sun. Then, Moses and Elijah appear. But for all this *visual* razzle-dazzle going on up on that mountaintop, the most important part of this experience was not anything they *saw*. It was what they *heard*. A cloud envelops them, and God's voice is heard, saying, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with him I am well pleased; listen to him!"

Listen to him! These men had been traveling with Jesus, hearing what he taught, and witnessing his miracles. Yet, as the story of George the engineer reminds us, no matter how close we are to someone, if our phone is off the hook, they won't be able to get through to us. At the Transfiguration it was as if God spoke directly to the disciples and said, "Jesus is trying to reach you but you're not letting him get through to you. Hang up the phone and listen for his call!" Although Peter, James and John were on the same mountaintop with Jesus, the shortest distance between them and him was a voice beamed all the way from heaven!

Just six days before the trip to the mountaintop, Jesus had told the disciples that he must go to Jerusalem where he would undergo suffering at the hands of the religious authorities, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. At least, he tried to tell them. But all he got was a busy

signal. They didn't want to believe their ears. Peter even took Jesus aside and said, "God forbid! This must never happen to you!" To which Jesus replied, "You have your mind set on the things of man, not the things of God." In other words, their phone was off the hook.

If the disciples didn't like what Jesus predicted for himself, how much less must they have wanted to hear what he had to say about them! Because the next thing he told them was that any who wanted to become his followers must take up *their* cross and follow him! Sometimes there are benefits to not hearing, aren't there? What we hear makes a claim upon us. It challenges us. Especially when Jesus is the one who speaks. But it also can inspire and empower us. What we ignore or deny, on the other hand, diminishes us. It obstructs us in fulfilling our God given purposes in life. George, the engineer, was uniquely qualified to ensure the quality of the radio transmission from the South Pole that so many were waiting anxiously to hear. But when he proved unable to hear the call from the studio, it took a special intervention to alert him.

As Christians, we are all responsible to maintain the lines of communication with God. Who knows what special purpose God has for you, *only you*, to fulfill? Listening is hard work, though. Like Peter, we may think we know better. Our minds are set on a certain track and we unplug from any other perspective. Even God's perspective. The season of Lent begins this week on Ash Wednesday and Lent is a good time to apply ourselves to listening attentively to God. The UCC has a slogan; "God is still speaking." The question is, "Who's listening?" It's like the old riddle about, if a tree falls in the forest and there's nobody around to hear it, does it really make a sound?

What are some of the things that prevent us from listening when God speaks? Perhaps the most obvious impediment is that the pace of our lives doesn't allow time to listen to God. Listening requires us to take time and wait patiently. But if we are not busy at some activity then we quickly grow impatient and feel that we are wasting time. It is for that reason that the Lenten tradition of giving something up is a very practical way of lessening the static in our lives that interferes with our hearing Christ's voice, so that Jesus does not get a "busy signal" when he is trying to get through to us.

Another reason that we don't always listen well to God's Son is that we're afraid we won't like what we might hear. Jesus' words about his followers taking up their crosses and following are a good example. Peter's mistake was hoping that they could all stay on the mountain instead of following Jesus to Jerusalem where all his dire predictions awaited them. But while Jesus leads us up mountains to be inspired, he also leads us down into valleys to put that inspiration to work. The story of Jesus' Transfiguration reminds us that life consists of both mountains and

valleys, glory and struggle.

The significance of Moses and Elijah appearing to speak with Jesus is that it revealed Jesus' authority to be no less than that of these two central figures of the Jewish faith; Moses, who represented the Law and Commandments, and Elijah who represented the Prophets. But Moses and Elijah had something else in common with Jesus. The messages that God gave them to deliver often fell on deaf ears; even as Jesus' words often did—and still do—fail to get through to his followers.

A researcher once asked the leader of a religious community, “Do the people of your community believe in miracles?” The religious leader answered, “That depends on what you mean by miracles. Some people call it a miracle when God does the will of the people. We consider it a miracle when the people do the will of God.”

As we approach the season of Lent, let us make it a priority to be sure that our lines of communication with Jesus are open. Sometimes it will be a word of comfort that comes to us; other times it may be a word of challenge. One challenge that soon lies before this congregation will be the conducting of a good transition in Pastoral leadership. There are numerous tasks involved in making that happen and all of them rely on keeping lines open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps, then, this season of Lent is the ideal time to discern and prepare for the next big thing that God has in store!

© 2022 Raymond Medeiros

Preached: FCCW on February 27, 2022