

Transfiguration_YearB_080512
All Saints Episcopal Church

"This is my son, my beloved, with whom I am very pleased. Listen to him."

Today we are celebrating the Feast of the Transfiguration, having transferred it from tomorrow, Aug 6. The Transfiguration is one of a group of feasts of our Lord that can take precedence of a Sunday; so it is OK to do what we've done, in case you are worried!

But without carrying on further about the calendar, I'll just dive in to the story itself. It should be a familiar one because we hear it at least once every year, so I'm going to go straight to what I consider the heart of the matter: the voice that comes from the clouds saying, "This is my son, my beloved, with whom I am very pleased. Listen to him."

Peter and James and John are trying to figure out what their response should be to this event, this phenomenon, this trick of the light - they don't know what to call it yet. But God tells them what to do: listen to Jesus.

Listening is so important. Some of us are natural-born listeners, it seems. Others of us have to really work at it to listen well. It takes training. It takes practice. You have to listen to understand what someone else needs or wants or what they're trying to tell you. And I mean listening to other people - your family, your friends, even strangers.

But listening to God? How do we do that when we can't see God, or touch God, or know where God is at any given time?

For our Vacation Bible School this summer, the theme was 'Focus on the Faithful' - not to be confused with the infamous Focus on the Family. We chose 5 Bible characters on which to focus - Noah, Sarah, Joseph, Moses and Jonah. But they aren't people we can see, just like we can't see God. So we had to learn about focusing in a different way.

We learned to listen - to listen to their stories, to learn how they listened to God, and to listen to each other. And we did those things by beginning the week with our Godly Play story called 'Listening for God.' I think all of us can learn from this.

This is the lesson about listening for God and the way God comes to us.

God is never far away. God's Spirit is always closer than breath. But unless we stop and listen, we might not notice.

We practice listening. We listen with our whole selves - with our bodies, our minds, our hearts, our imaginations, our souls.

Sometimes, God touches us in that deep, deep place we call the heart. We feel the Spirit's presence there. We say, "Here I am, God." Then the Spirit helps us to know how to love, what to do, and who to be.

We practice listening. We listen with our whole selves.

Sometimes God touches us through another person. God in one person sees God in another person. Heart touches heart. We say, "Welcome, God." Then the Spirit helps us to know how to love, what to do, and who to be.

We practice listening. We listen with our whole selves.

Sometimes God touches us through the wonders of creation. God touches our eyes...

Our ears...

Our noses...

Our tongues...

Our skin.

We feel the Spirit's presence. We say, "Welcome, God." Then the Spirit helps us to know how to love, what to do, and who to be.

We practice listening. We listen with our whole selves.

Sometimes God touches us when we move our bodies. When we walk the path of a labyrinth, or just walk, we might find God is walking beside us. When we dance, or run, or play a sport, we might feel the Spirit's presence, too.

We practice listening. We listen with our whole selves.

Sometimes God touches us through sacred story. God in our hearts works together with the words of the stories and we feel the Spirit's presence. What are these stories? They are the ancient stories of the people of God who traveled in the desert.

They are the stories of Jesus and his parables, which are gifts to us. These and many other stories of God's people come to us from the Bible.

There are other stories of God's people of any time who lived in faith and love and holy obedience. And the Spirit can come to us in other words, too - in poetry and prayer and song.

We welcome God in these stories and words. Then the Spirit helps us to know how to love, what to do, and who to be.

We practice listening. We listen with our whole selves.

Sometimes God touches us through the community gathered together for worship, or service to others or religion class. God touches hearts. Hearts touch hearts. The Spirit helps us to see God in each other. God is present in a special way.

We say, "Welcome, God." We say, "Here we are, God. Yes, we will be your people." Then we become the presence of God in the world. We go out to be God's eyes and hearts and mouths and hands and feet in the world.

We practice listening. We listen with our whole selves.

Sometimes, even when we are listening, we can't hear god. God is there, anyway, closer than breath, and so the darkness is beautiful.

*Wherever we are, we practice listening, and God comes to us in many different ways. **We listen with our whole selves** - with our bodies, our minds, our hearts, our imaginations, and our souls - and God's Spirit helps us to know how to love, what to do, and who to be.*

So...let's practice. Practice, practice, practice! And when we are able to listen with our whole selves -- our bodies, our minds, our hearts, our imaginations and our souls are transformed into the people God has created us to be. We are able to bring God's presence to others by feeding, clothing, visiting, and healing them and by helping them to listen for God as well. And then, together, we can transform the rest of the world into God's shalom. Thanks be to God!