

Sermon for Sunday, February 26, 2017 - "Listen, Be Raised Up, Fear Not"

Transfiguration of Our Lord
February 26, 2017
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Decorah, Iowa
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Listen, Be Raised Up, Fear Not

Beloved of God, grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus.

Peter's time on the mountaintop with Jesus is a confusing, tumultuous time - not unlike the times we are living in now as a country. Of course, what happens to Peter, James and John on the mountain is a wondrous, unique experience. They see Jesus shining like the sun and talking with ancient heroes of the faith. Very few people have experienced anything that glorious. I don't intend to draw parallels to that event but rather to the range of emotions and thoughts Peter must have had.

We are living in confusing, tumultuous times as a country. Some here are pleased by what's happening, some dread it, yet all of us are living in a time of great disruption and change. So, the words spoken to Peter, James and John on the mountain are important for us today as well: Listen to Jesus, get up, do not be afraid.

Right before Peter heads up the mountain with Jesus, he confesses that Jesus is the "Messiah, the Son of the Living God." He's the first person to do this; Jesus praises and blesses him. But then Jesus starts talking about how the Messiah will suffer and die. This makes no sense to Peter so he rebukes Jesus. Jesus turns to him and says, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling-block to me." Talk about a roller coaster of emotions. Peter totally nails it and then falls flat on his face.

Soon after this, Peter, James and John go up the mountain with Jesus and he is transfigured right in front of them. He is still himself but he is shining like the sun. Then the great heroes Moses and Elijah show up and start talking with Jesus.

Peter is not at all sure how to respond to all this. He overreacts by trying to build dwelling places for Jesus, Moses and Elijah, but also seems reluctant to act - he seems to want to just stay on the mountain with Jesus.

In the middle of Peter's confusion, God interrupts to say, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!" When the disciples hear this, they fall to the ground and are overcome by fear. But then Jesus comes and touches them and says, "Get up and do not be afraid."

So, all told, on the mountain the disciples hear three messages: Listen to him, get up, do not be afraid. These are words we need to hear now as well.

First, “listen to him.” When things are in flux and unclear, we need to try to hear what God is saying to us personally and as a community - God is still speaking and guiding us today. Of course, it is no small task to discern what God is saying; but the guidance God gives the disciples on the mountain is still true for us today. To understand God, we need to look to Jesus and listen to him. We need to pay attention to what Jesus says and does and to those he notices and helps. As a community, we will see and hear different things as we do this, we will disagree; but if we stay in conversation with each other we will get a fuller sense of what God wants to say to us through Jesus.

The second thing the disciples hear on the mountain is “get up.” Except it’s not just “get up,” like get off the ground. The Greek verb here is the one used to describe Jesus being raised from the dead. So, what Jesus actually says to the disciples on the mountain is “be raised up;” or even, “be resurrected.” When the disciples are overcome by the fear of God’s voice and by all the tumult they’re facing, Jesus touches them and resurrects them. He raises them into new life, into participation in God’s abundant life.

Jesus does the same thing for us when we meet him in his word, in worship, in one another, in those the world sees as the least and the last, and in holy communion as we meet him in his body and blood. He touches us and resurrects us and calls us beloved. He raises us up to share in God’s abundant life and to live out God’s love for all the world.

Finally, the disciples hear, “do not be afraid.” This is the most consistent message in scripture, it’s what the disciples needed to hear on the mountain and what we need to hear now more than ever.

We all have different reasons to be afraid - the threat of terrorism, potential deportation of friends, health benefits and medical concerns, changes facing state employees and Luther faculty and staff - to name just a few. To each of these different fears, the message of scripture is the same: God is with us and always at work to raise us up and bring new life; we need not fear.

This week at the Congregation Council retreat, our Vice President Megan Buckingham shared part of a Wendell Berry poem that encourages us to “practice resurrection.”

In times of tumult, we are called to practice resurrection by listening to Jesus, by being raised up and not being afraid. We are called to practice resurrection by praying a Psalm for Spring while surrounded by snow, remembering we have been touched by the palm of Jesus’ hand and raised to new life, and by praying Send Me, Jesus and then following where he leads.

Let’s take a moment for prayer now.