

**SCRIPTURE TEXT:** Mark 9:2-9

**SERMON TITLE:** Listen to Him!

Underlying this strange and incredible story is a question: Who is this Jesus and why should we pay attention to him? The story addresses this question by inviting us to an epiphany—a revelation-event that proclaims Jesus' identity and authority.

And as you could tell, this epiphany story is filled with dramatic elements and images that move us toward an extraordinary climax that's intended to address the basic question, and in the process, change our lives: Jesus and three disciples ascend a high mountain. Jesus is transfigured with his clothes becoming a dazzling white in a heavenly sort of way. Elijah and Moses make an appearance and talk with Jesus. The disciples are terrified. Peter doesn't know what to say, but he speaks up anyway. He thinks it's good to be in this place and he wants to build three shelters, one for Jesus, one for Elijah and one for Moses. I guess he wants to linger awhile for worship. A cloud overshadows them. And then the climax: *And from the cloud there came a voice, "This is my Son, the Beloved, listen to him!"* Suddenly, the disciples are left alone with Jesus and he tells them to be quiet about all of this.

So who is Jesus and why should we pay attention to him? Well, according to the story, Jesus bears the glory of God. In the company of Elijah and Moses, Jesus is the radiant one. When Elijah and Moses disappear, Jesus is left standing alone with his disciples. And then there's the climax—that voice from the cloud: *"This is my Son, the Beloved, listen to him!"*

So what do we think? Is Jesus God's beloved Son? Well, my answer is yes! I've already made that leap of faith. Do we listen to him—do we give him the authority he deserves in our lives as God's beloved Son? Well, it's here that I have a problem.

What I've discovered through the years is that when it comes to Jesus—the beloved Son of God—I practice selective listening. I listen intently to the words of Jesus that are easy for me to hear—words about loving God and loving the neighbor as myself, for example.

But when it comes to the hard stuff that Jesus talks about—I don't want to hear—and so I cover my ears and make noises to keep from listening to him—to keep the words from sinking in and disrupting my life.

For example, in the verses immediately preceding this story of the Transfiguration, Mark's gospel says this about Jesus: *Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.*

I don't want to hear this. It's not right that the Son of Man should undergo suffering and rejection and death at the hands of his enemies—even if there is a promised resurrection! This looks too much like weakness and folly! If I had been writing the story, the Son of Man would have come with an unambiguous display of glory and a once-and-for-all triumph over evil. All of this talk about suffering, rejection and death only complicates things.

Now I must confess that I have a lot of sympathy for Peter in Mark's account. After Peter heard what Jesus had to say about the Son of Man's fate, he pulled Jesus aside and rebuked him. Peter didn't want to hear any of this stuff either.

But Jesus didn't stop. In fact, Jesus rebuked Peter: *Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.*

And then after that, Jesus spoke a word even harder to hear because it's a word about us. He said: *If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross*

*and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.*

Are we ready to listen to Jesus when he talks likes this? Are we ready to entertain the thought that the empty cross before us every Sunday morning might actually be a cross waiting to be picked up by us so that we might be nailed upon it—so that we might die upon it at the hands of our enemies--just like Jesus did? Are we ready for that? Are we listening to him?

Well, I don't know about you, but I struggle with this stuff. In fact, I struggle with all of the hard sayings of Jesus about cross-bearing, about wealth and possessions, dealing with the poor, taking the servants place, loving our enemies and all the rest. I know that he's the Beloved Son of God; I know that I should listen to him; but in so many ways, I don't.

For example, back in 1984, I was a pilgrim on the Walk to Emma. In case you don't know, the Walk to Emmaus is a 72-hour short course in Christianity. Well, during that weekend experience, I confronted my own resistance to the costly demands of Jesus.

It was on a Friday night in the chapel at the Mt. Wesley Retreat Center in Kerrville. After reading Luke's story of the two disciples who encountered the risen Christ on the road to Emmaus, the clergy director of the Walk said this: "Visualize Jesus walking into your situation. Sense what he would do and what he would say. How would Jesus react to your fears?"

Well, as those words were read, I felt the resistance building within me. I wanted Christ to stay away from me. I felt myself closed off to him. I feared that if I let him come in, he would only do what he had done before--and that was--to call me to a deeper discipleship.

You see, I have been struggling for several years with these hard issues of discipleship. I had done the cost accounting and I was scared to death. Jesus' costly demands were beginning to make claims upon my life that I wasn't ready to accept.

Well, in the chapel that night at Mt. Wesley, I heard the call again--and again I felt the resistance. I was unwilling and unyielding. My attachments to the status quo were too great. The risks seemed unacceptable. My soul cried to the Lord: "Leave me alone! I don't want this! Leave me alone!"

But Christ hasn't left me alone. And every time I encounter this text, the reality of who he is identity and the directness of God's command hit me between the eyes: ***This is my Son, the Beloved, listen to him!*** How do you respond?