

Mark 9:2-9

The story in today's Gospel reading would most likely be placed in the Science Fiction section of bookstores. Jesus changing in appearance, shining like the full strength of the sun, two prophets who have been dead for centuries standing there conversing with Him, a voice speaking from a cloud... not something you witness every day; not even once in a lifetime. Only three men were privileged to be eyewitnesses, and they were not allowed to speak of it until after Jesus rose from the dead.

This story is not science, nor is it fiction. It really happened...once, on a mountaintop. And it won't happen again until the world comes to an end. On the Last Day, not three men, but all men--all people--will see Jesus in this way, coming out of heaven in full glory, and joining Him will be Moses, Elijah, and all the saints. On that day we will see all these things with our eyes. But until that day, God wants us to use our ears.

"Listen to Him," said the voice from the cloud. Peter, James, and John could not see God the Father, but there was no mistaking His words. One command He gave. One instruction: Listen to Jesus. This was no easy task. For one thing, Peter was yapping his mouth off. It's hard to listen when you're busy talking. For another thing, their eyes were front and center, not their ears. This was a spectacle to behold. And when you are focused intently on something with your eyes, someone could be yelling in your ear and you don't even hear them.

But faith never comes by seeing. It comes by hearing. Romans 10 is clear on this. Abraham told the rich man in hell that his brothers would not believe even if they saw Lazarus rise from the dead with their eyes, but only if they listened to the Word of God.

And so God says, *"Listen to (Jesus)"* He could have said, "Believe in Him" from the cloud, or "Follow Him," or "Love Him." For all these are commands in Scripture. But even these commands do not outrank the command to listen to Jesus.

If someone says, "I believe in Jesus," but does not listen to Him, he is deceiving himself. If someone says, "I love Jesus, and I follow Him in my life," but does not listen to Him, he is not being truthful. *"Faith comes by hearing...the word of Christ."* You believe in Jesus because His words are in you. You follow Him by listening to His voice. You love Him because of what He speaks to you.

How very telling that right after the Father said, *"Listen to Him"* from the cloud, Jesus came to His disciples, touched them, and spoke these words, *"Rise, and have no fear."* St. Matthew records this for us even though St. Mark does not. God wants us to listen to Jesus because His words are life and they free us from all our fears.

If we're honest with ourselves, we are like Peter, James, and John on that mountain. We have fears just as they had. We don't need to go up a high mountain to have fear; we have it right here where we live. If we had no fears, we would be something more than human. You and I live in a wicked world. There is evil all around us, and there is evil dwelling within us. We don't want to be afraid, but we are weak. As Peter, James, and John bowed in terror on the mountain, so when

God's thundering Law speaks, we cringe in fear, for He speaks against us. There is no secret hidden from His eyes. He knows our thoughts. He knows the desires of our heart. We cannot hide our sins from Him. There isn't one of His commandments we have obeyed. When we confess, "*I deserve Your temporal and eternal punishment,*" these are serious words. And if we have no fear when speaking them, then we are taking God's Law and our sins too lightly.

You and I are not able to escape our fears. We cannot free ourselves from the curse of the Law. But as Jesus came to His disciples, so He comes to you. The amazing thing about the words of Jesus is that they have the power to do what they command. At the tomb of Lazarus, Jesus called out to him, and His words made the dead man alive. Every miracle Jesus did was carried out through the power in His words.

And so on the mountaintop, Jesus came to His disciples and said, "*Rise, and have no fear.*" This was a tall order. How do you tell a man facing death to have no fear? How do you tell someone who has been beaten down by guilt and remorse to rise and have no fear? The power is in the words of Jesus. This is why the Father says, "*Listen to Him.*" Cringing in terror, when Jesus spoke to Peter, James, and John, they were able to rise out of their fear. The power was not in them. The power came from Jesus.

My friend, Jesus' words are just as powerful today, and the words He speaks are for you. "I forgive you." Jesus spoke these words to you through the mouth of your pastor this morning. Every time you gather here, Jesus speaks these words to you. And they do just exactly what they say. Your sins are forgiven. The curse of the Law is removed from you. The burden of your guilt is lifted.

This is no wishful thinking. Jesus has the authority to forgive you because He laid down His life for you. He already took your burden to the cross. He accepted your punishment. He was loaded down with your guilt. The only way for someone to leave here today with sins not forgiven, still burdened with guilt and remorse, is to not believe the words of Jesus. His words are true even if I refuse to believe them. But then my unbelief nullifies what He has done for me. But, my friend, Jesus' words, which raised Lazarus from the grave, which raised the disciples out of their terror, can certainly raise us out of our unbelief.

His words with the water of Holy Baptism brought us from death to life, from unbelief to being His Christians. There is no power greater than Jesus' words. And yet, His words to you are spoken ever so gently, ever so lovingly, ever so invitingly. "*Rise,*" are His words to each one of you, "*and have no fear.*" Stop disbelieving and believe. Whatever your fear, whatever your guilt, whatever your sin, Jesus lifts you up out of it today. Here is His feast spread out for you on the altar. Here is His glorified body and blood--the same glorified body Peter, James, and John saw on the mountaintop, and the same body that hung on a cross for you; and the same blood that was poured out for your forgiveness, for your salvation. Today, right now, just as He did on a mountaintop years ago, Jesus comes to His disciples, touches them, and says to you: "*Rise, and have no fear.*" Amen.