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Transfiguration

### Matthew 17:1-9

#### LISTEN TO CHRIST!

A brilliant, blinding flash of light. A familiar Teacher suddenly so radiant with an inhuman brightness that even His clothes made you squint, flanked from out of nowhere by two of the greatest preachers of Bible history –long since departed from this earth, but not dead –very much alive and holding conversation. A growing, pervasive cloud thick yet bright, dense yet untouchable, enveloping all around. And then a voice, a clear, unearthly voice.

Clearly this fleeting glimpse of glory, this momentary flash of the future was all about Christ and for Christ as He was on the brink of descending to the depths of His pain, His sacrifice and then the tomb. But Jesus saw fit to have Peter, James and John there too. The Voice aimed His words not only at Jesus but also at these three. He saw to it to have witnesses who could later tell us what happened up on that mountain. We heard Peter's description and its ramifications for us in the second Scripture Lesson today.

And what would the Voice have us do towards Jesus?

Worship Him?

Obey Him?

Follow Him?

Offer things to Him?

Offer ourselves to Him?

Work for Him?

Honor Him?

Praise Him?

The Voice said one thing: "*Listen to Him!*" This Christ was about to be pummeled, have His flesh torn, be nailed to a cross and then experience the horror of being abandoned by His heavenly Father – all for our sakes. But what does God want from us more than

anything else? Of all the things He could have said at that moment what does He tell us?

Not: Try to help Him.

Not: Try to stop Him.

Not: Feel sorry for Him.

He only says: *Listen to Him!*

So let's listen to Christ. He emerges from the heavenly majesty on that mountaintop and what are His first words? "*Get up!*"

Get up? Was this some kind of cruel joke? When the men had heard the Voice from the cloud they fell facedown in terror. They were paralyzed with fright. They had just been exposed to the bare majesty of the Almighty. You might think that should be a beautiful thing. But not here. Not on this side of heaven. Hearing God speak to us directly and seeing His unmasked glory spells death for us. The Bible says God is a consuming fire, that it is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

In the classic book series that includes Little House on the Prairie Laura Ingalls is annoyed with her older sister, Mary, for always being so perfect. Perhaps you have had that feeling yourself. You even resented someone for it. Our sinful hearts do not enjoy being exposed for as ugly we really are. But to be in the presence of the absolute holiness of God is downright damning, hateful, and merciless.

As the Psalm says, "*If you, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness. Therefore you are feared.*"

With Christ, God supplies forgiveness so that we are not swept away by His judgment. Christ's first words to Peter, James and John were not only, "Get up!" but also "Do not be afraid!"

When God spoke directly apart from Christ, it was only terrifying to the disciples. But when He spoke to them through Christ, they had Him once again as their dear Friend and their loving Brother. In Christ, all fright is removed. He took all the guilt of our hearts,

the guilt of every self-serving motive, every resentment at what's right and good, every frustration at God for being so exacting, and Christ removed it from us. He paid the full penalty for our sinfulness with His sufferings and death on the cross. Trusting Christ we have nothing more to be afraid of.

Since God wants to save us, it's no wonder He has told us to listen to Christ. The Bible says all the fullness of God dwells in Christ bodily. So when Christ speaks, God speaks. And what He speaks through Christ is His gracious kindness, His loving mercy, His empowering grace, and His life-giving forgiveness.

When Jesus spoke to Peter, James, and John, "*Get up, Don't be afraid,*" new life entered their limbs, new strength energized their muscles. They found the comfort and encouragement to do just that: to get up and not be afraid. They found salvation, whether it be salvation from the anxiety of the moment or from the ever-burning anger of a holy God, by listening to Christ.

Others who saw Christ when He was here on earth, saw Him suffer and die and rise again, but did not listen to what He said, never benefited from His saving work, never received any of the things He came to earn for us and to give us.

To this day, God has promised to meet us only in the person of Christ. To this day He has promised to speak to us in order to save us only through the mouth of Christ. He has not promised to speak to us for our good anywhere else. If we want to be saved we will listen to Christ.

You'll notice that Peter, James and John did not speak with Moses and Elijah. Only Christ did. Only Christ can have one foot in heaven and one foot on earth. Only Christ can be our bridge to God. Only Christ can cross over to our world to speak with us and save us. So Christ does cross over to us in tangible ways.

He has not promised to speak to you in your heart or through your prayers. Satan can have a hayday with that and play all sorts of harmful games with you if you look for Christ in your heart or

your head. Rather Christ speaks His forgiveness, new life and salvation to us through the water of Holy Baptism. He instituted the office of the Holy Ministry to speak to you on His behalf. Using His ministers Christ comes to you through Scripture, through confession and absolution, and through preaching. He also comes to you through the mouth of any believer who speaks what Scripture says. And in His Holy Supper Christ Himself crosses over into our world, offering us His own body and blood, the life-saving antidote for our sin, problems and death.

Listen to Christ where He has promised to speak to you, through Word and Sacrament, and you will find the same strength that the disciples were given –new strength, new heart, a new mind to get up as He once told them to do, get up and follow Him, get up and face the day, get up and get to work, get up and not be afraid.