

God is nothing if he isn't a showman. He is into the theatrics of it all. We have two examples from today's readings that prove that God likes a good show and knows how to use it. It is Transfiguration Sunday and our stories today have a lot to do with that "show".

Neither Moses nor Jesus really needed a mountaintop experience to believe more fully in their relationship with God...but here we are with two stories involving two different people that are big in theatrics. What I am going to examine today is more about reactions to the theatrics instead of what Moses and Jesus must have been thinking. The reaction of others to these theatrics is really quite fascinating and I think can help us in modern times have a better understanding of how to seek out God and how to have a stronger relationship with our faith. After all, I would contend that we come to church, we tell people what our beliefs are and we sing hymns all to accomplish that one thing...a stronger relationship with God.

Today's old testament reading could be read from the perspective of Moses and how God is communicating with him as an intermediary, but I am looking at it from a different perspective. God didn't call Moses up on the mountain top for 40 days for Moses' benefit. He did it because the people needed to find strength. Moses had the confidence and strength that he needed from the very first time God communicated with him. He had been in conversation with God every step of the way. But the people at the base of the mountain...they were a different story. This event is important for the people of Israel. Just think about the show that God puts on here. Thunder and Lightning, Trumpets blaring, fire as high as the eye could see, thick clouds billowing. He wants those folks to understand that God is there and God is on their side.

Let's jump ahead a few hundred years or so. God again calls a single person to the mountain top and puts on a show. This time, again, we know that Jesus really doesn't need the confidence of new found faith. He knows who he is, he doesn't need convinced. He brings with him up the mountain though a couple of people that maybe are not quite as sure. Peter, James and John are who this show is really for. Again, we see dazzling white robes, faces shining like the sun, Moses and Elijah appearing, bright clouds, and the works really. All very impressive to think about, I cannot even imagine witnessing.

So, how did the Israelites and Disciples react to all of this? Well, they were scared. They literally had the fear of God struck into their hearts. They become impatient, they forget all the good that God has done for them and they turn away.

The Israelites in the coming chapters of exodus are going to construct a gold calf and even Moses' brother Aaron gives in. It reminded me of the old movie "The Ten Commandments" that they show every year around Easter. The 40 days that Moses spends on the mountain is one of the scenes in that movie and while Moses is up getting the commandments, the people are on the ground forgetting that they used to be slaves and all of the miracles that happened to release them. They turn on God and they turn on Moses while he is not there. Their fear of the unknown makes them impatient.

We also look to Peter, James and John. Fear of the unknown tests their faith and they do not react well. If we look ahead just a little bit of time, Peter will forget all of this, even Jesus' transfiguration soon enough and will turn his back on God, just like the people of Israel did. He will deny him.

I like to ask questions in my sermons that hopefully make you think, so I will do that in just a minute. First, though, let me tell you what I know is a pretty bad joke. I won't take credit for writing it, I will just take credit for delivering it...probably badly.

There was an avid outdoorsman who was on a hike and saw what looked like there might be a fire on the horizon. He is on the edge of a cliff but can't get a good look to see what is going on. He is standing next to a tree and decides he just needs to be a little bit higher to figure it out. He climbs the tree and makes it out to one of the furthest branches hanging over the edge of the cliff where he can see exactly what is going on. All of a sudden "Crack" and the tree limb he is standing on gives way. He grabs on to the next branch of the tree and looks down at a major fall. He is hanging on for dear life and after about an hour, his arms are tired and sore and he doesn't know how much longer he will be able to hold on. He looks up and cries out "God, help me, help me please!" All of a sudden the clouds parted and the sun shone on his face warmer than it ever has and a voice says "Let, Go". The guy paused for a moment, looked up and said "is there anyone else up there?"

How often do we not trust our faith and what God is telling us? How often do we fail to recognize God's voice in our lives at all? Every Day we are scared, we must deal with fear in our lives and in our day. Is our first response to turn away from our faith and to not listen for the voice of God?

During my Master's program, I was able to do a lot of study about listening and have come to realize something. We do not listen well. We think we listen well, but I even find times when I don't listen to myself well. I don't take the time to find a quiet spot and truly listen. Have you ever gone into a room and forgotten what you went in there for? I do it all the time. Some people say that is a case of "sometimers", but it simply means you are not prioritizing your own voice. You are not listening to yourself closely enough to make it important. That can be a pretty important shift in your thinking right? If you take the time to truly listen, how many epiphanies will you have? How many times will you find the wonder of God's words in your life?

I remember one time where I was able to feel closer to God by listening and I am certainly glad that I was. I don't know how many of you remember George Propp who was one of our deaf members several years ago. Pastor Ray officiated his celebration of life service and as is my usual place at those services I was sitting back at the sound system and had one of my biggest "epiphany" moments in my life. It was not a mountain top experience as they say, I was simply in the right place at the right time and willing to listen. George had always said that if he were hearing, there are three things he would want to hear. Amazing Grace, the bag pipes and a jet

fly over. At the end of the service, Pastor Ray had me queue up the sound of a jet fly over and it was cranked loud enough that the windows in the church were rattling. As that sound faded, a bag piper began to play Amazing Grace. To this day, just recounting that story gives me goose bumps. I was moved in a way I had never been moved before. God made himself a little closer to me that day. I am glad I was listening that day. If we harken that back to our stories from the bible this morning, George did not need to be made to feel closer to God in that moment, he was already standing side by side with him in the heaven. That was for us, those of us in attendance. I couldn't see God in that room, I couldn't even see the other people worshiping with us that day, but I could certainly feel the grace of God descending with a promise. "I am who I am" and I am with you. My light will shine upon you.

That was something that I considered to be "major" but I have learned to listen for the voice of God in smaller ways as well. On Facebook, occasionally, I will see a post from a friend with something like "I found my car keys, God is good." I am a little hesitant to throw my hands up in praise generally with the mundane. I don't remember who told the joke, but athletes that point to the sky after they score and say "God wanted us to win" make me just a little insane...did that mean God wanted the other team to lose? I don't think God is that vested in our sports. However, with that said, I am learning to recognize the voice of God in the little things. Let's look at those athletes. They developed a set of skills that is simply amazing...they practiced harder than anyone else, they have more talent than anyone else...that might be something to praise God for. What about those car keys. Does God help you point in the right direction like a game of hot/cold? No, but you avoided being late for work by finding your keys. I am starting to understand and a little bit about the fact that finding God in the everyday routine is not a bad thing. Just a couple of weeks ago, walking along the beach in southern Alabama by myself, I was able to make some decisions about my job and career.

Are we as Christians seeking out those mountain top moments only or are we even looking in the right place at all? I want to challenge you this week as we move into the season of Lent to really listen. Listen to yourself, listen for the voice of God in your life. Don't wait for something big to happen, let God speak to you and be willing to "Let go"!

Please pray with me: Dear God, help us to discern your voice from all of the noise that goes on around us. We recognize that in order to become closer to you, we must understand that you are there in both the big and the small. As the sun shines to warm our faces, as we have a conversation with an old friend or meet a new person that adds something to our life, you are there with us. Help us to recognize you in our daily lives and lead a life that is devoted to you. Amen