

Scripture:
Mark 9:2-9

“Listen to Him”

How many people watched the Superbowl this year?

What about just the half time show?

I understand that there are a significant amount of people who only ever watch the half time show without ever tuning into the game.

I myself usually watch the game and miss most of the half time show ---- but that’s just me.

Most people who live in North America ----- have watched ---- or at least seen highlights --- of at least one half time show of the Superbowl in their lives.

And for those who haven’t ever watched a Superbowl half time show ----- suffice it to say it is over the top and then some.

Spectacular --- and dazzling with all of its lights --- lasers --- smoke --- explosions --- glitter --- glam --- and so on --- and oh yeah --- some music as well.

It’s a visual display without parallel ----- indeed the top 21 most watched Television broadcasts in North America are all Superbowls.

The point is the Superbowl and its eye striking half time show is all about watching it ---- taking it in with your eyes.

Imagine someone at the Superbowl ---- particularly during the dazzling lights and smoke and explosions of the half time show --- saying ---- “Wow ----- listen to this --- close your eyes and just listen.”

And yet in a way that’s kind of what happens in Mark’s gospel today.

“After six days Jesus too Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone.

There he was transfigured before them.

His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them.

And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus.

And then skipping ahead a few verses --- verse 7 --- and “then a cloud appeared and covered them...”

Talk about a visual display.

They are on the top of a mountain ----- with a beautiful --- no doubt breathtaking view.

Suddenly Jesus is transfigured --- He changes ---- He’s exalted and glorified.

His clothes become dazzling white --- whiter than could ever be bleached --- ----- as white as white can be.

And as if this isn’t enough ----- Elijah and Moses appear and begin talking with Him.

And all of this is then accompanied by a cloud covering them.

Talk about a visual display.

Jesus --- Moses ---- Elijah --- dazzling white --- mountain top ----- clouds of smoke.

What a sight.

Similar in --- “pop” --- to say ----- the Superbowl half time show.

Something to behold ---- with your eyes.

But then ---- God speaks from the cloud --- and says ----- in verse 7 ---- “This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!”

“This is my son, whom I love. Listen to him!”

It no doubt would have been pretty difficult to shut out --- and put aside the visual grandeur of the scene and stop to listen.

Of all the miracles in the Bible this may be the most visually stunning of them all ----- mountain top glowing --- the 2 greatest prophets of them all --- Moses and Elijah ----joining Jesus ----- God appearing and speaking in a cloud.

And the instruction is --- listen.

It's not -----“Look at my majesty and beauty and power” --- or -----
“Behold the awesome display of my goodness.”

But instead simply ---- “Listen to him!”

Listen to Christ --- God says.

Don't get all caught up in the wonders of His power ---- or the beauty of His presence even.

Don't try to figure Him out.

Don't try to figure it out.

Don't try to explain Him.

But ---- “Listen to Him.”

As I was preparing this week --- I thought of a song I remembered back in high school in 1988 ----- I'm dating myself I know but who cares.

The Swedish group Roxette --- anybody remember them ---- Roxette ----- anyway they released a song called “listen to your heart” --- anyone remember the song “listen to your heart”?

Well one of the lines in the chorus is --- “listen to your heart ---- there's nothing else you can do.”

“Listen to your heart ---- there's nothing else you can do.”

Often we're told to listen to our heart --- do what your heart tells you.

And it kind of sounds like good advice doesn't it --- listen to your heart --- go with your heart.

But in truth it isn't very good advice at all--- or at least it's certainly not the very best advice.

Listen to Him --- listen to Jesus is far better advice --- than listen to your heart.

Without getting sidetracked into an exploration of the fall or of the doctrine of original sin ---- I think we can say that the human heart can be corrupt.

We live in a fallen world --- a corrupt --- and less than ideal --- less than faithful world.

To rely simply on our hearts can therefore lead to disaster.

Sometime our heart just wants a quick fix --- an itching of a short term desire --- or want --- instead of something true and pure.

To defer to listening to our heart can therefore lead to poor choices.

Sorry Roxette you may have gone number 1 in Canada ---- the US and of all places Poland with --- "listen to your heart" ----- saying "Listen to your heart ---- there's nothing else you can do."

But you're wrong ---- there is something else you can do ----- you can listen to Him.

God's son ---- Jesus Christ.

Mark's gospel reading today pushes a few questions to the forefront ----- the first ---- "Who --- and what do we listen to?"

And then another ----- "How is the transcendent is revealed in our world today?"

"How is the transcendent or divine --- revealed today?"

Perhaps some of us ---- from time to time ---- or maybe once in a lifetime ---
----- may have an experience like Peter --- James --- and John did on the
mountaintop with Jesus.

Perhaps --- maybe.

But it is far more likely that God will reveal Himself to us in far less
dramatic --- but --- no less powerful ways.

Besides the very personal and intimate ways that God reveals Himself to us
there are an array of beautiful examples that can be easily found.

Recently on the internet ---- perhaps some of us have seen it.

There was a video of two very young boys maybe 6 or 7 playing hockey.

Organized hockey ---- full pads ---- matching uniforms and so on.

And clearly the one boy is hardly able to skate --- let alone shoot or control
the puck.

And one day at practice ----- in what could be termed as a painstaking ordeal
another little player comes along side the obviously struggling boy and over
a series of minutes coaches him along to move closer and closer to the net
with the puck ---- at which point he finally takes a shot and the puck ever so
slowly slides in over the goal line ---- the goalie lets it go.

“He shoots --- he scores.”

Hardly a spectacle worthy of the Superbowl half time show or the lights ---
horns --- and fireworks ----- you might hear at maple Leaf gardens ---
when the Leafs score ----- although that hasn't happened too much lately
now has it ----- but I digress.

The point is the goal ----- painstakingly slow and undramatic as it was -----
----- wasn't much of a spectacle ---- but from a certain perspective --- that
of the child and his parents ----- it was no doubt a divine --- or transcendent
moment.

Powerful moment.

Finally he did it --- he pushed the puck over the line.

Another story --- also a sports story --- also a true story.

Theologian and congregational development guru Dr. Kennon Callahan tells the story of Bobby.

Dr. Callahan is a huge sports fan and has worked at various levels in sport --
- including professionally in the NFL.

And he tells the story of how when his boys were young he used to coach their baseball teams.

And how his philosophy as coach was that everyone gets to play.

Each boy got regular at bats and regular play in the field regardless of talent level ----- they were just young players after all.

Well this one year there was one boy ---- Bobby.

And Bobby was that kid that no matter how hard he tried --- he just couldn't seem to hit the ball.

He loved baseball ---- but couldn't seem to get a hit.

All year long to the chagrin of many of the parents Bobby got a regular --- one out of every 9 --- turn to hit the ball --- and almost 100% of the time he struck out ---- not even making contact with the ball.

You can well imagine how upset some of the parents were when the team --- ---- which was well coached ---- and had a few pretty good players had managed to make it to the league finals.

And with the usual drama of stories of this nature ---- the game is tied ----- it's the bottom of the ninth --- a man on third ---- and you guessed it ----- it's Bobby's turn to bat.

The parents know Callahan's approach ---- but it's the finals ---- they plea for coach Callahan to put in a pinch hitter ---- the season is on the line after all ----- but to no avail ----- Bobby's gonna hit Callahan says --- there will be no pinch hitter ----- the parents are frustrated to no end.

All that stands between them and the championships is a single --- a base hit --- and they win.

But Bobby's up to bat.

Strike out Bobby.

Callahan tells the story of how all he could do was pray as Bobby stepped into the batters box.

And then he describes it this way ---- and I quote.

“The best way to describe what happened next would be to say the ball hit the bat.”

“The best way to describe what happened next would be to say the ball hit the bat.”

The ball hit the bat --- and squirted through the infield.

Thank you God ---- Callahan sighed to himself ----- Thank you God!

Strike out Bobby not only made contact with the ball but it was a base hit --- ---- they won.

For Callahan --- for Bobby ----- for Bobby's parents that was a transcendent moment ---- a divine moment.

Way off to the side ---- in a little league ball park --- something magical happened ---- something with very little fanfare or “Pop” in the larger world outside of the few dozen families gathered there that day.

In Mark's gospel today there is a huge visual display of power --- they're on a mountain ---- Jesus changes into something dazzling white --- shining in the light of His glory.

Moses and Elijah ----- join Him and they talk.

A cloud appears.

And God suddenly says ---- “This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!”

And then what happens next ----- verse 8.

“Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus.”

In other words --- suddenly --- all of the lights ---- and glitz and glam --- and Moses and Elijah --- and the cloud ---- have all disappeared.

And as verse 9 says --- “As they were coming down the mountain Jesus gave them orders...”

In other words as they were coming down the mountain they were listening to Him.

Remember last week ----- the last few verses from Mark 8 ----- immediately preceding our reading for today --- Peter doesn't seem to grasp all that Jesus must do and be ----- His suffering and rejection and brutal death.

And so here today --- on the mountain ----- God uses a spectacular display to shake Peter up --- so that he would stop and actually listen to Jesus instead of just following his own heart and thinking that what he thought of as fitting for the Messiah was actually how it was all going to play out.

“Listen to Him.” ----- God says to Peter and the others.

“Listen to Him!” ----- God says to each and everyone one of us.

Hopefully God doesn't have to beat us over the head with some kind of spectacular ---- eye popping display ----- in order to shake us out of the cocoon that is our expectations --- and our assumptions as to how God works.

Listen to your heart ---- O.K. maybe sometimes.

Listen to your gut --- well also O.K. ---- maybe sometimes.

Listen to Him --- listen to God's Son ----- Jesus Christ ----- absolutely ---- all the time --- without exception.

God need not reveal Himself --- in some kind of spectacular display --- rivaling the half time show at the Superbowl.

As we hear in 1 Kings 19 verse 12 ----- sometimes it's "in a still small voice" ----- or ----- "gentle whisper" ---- that God speaks.

A little kid finally hitting the ball as his parents had likely prayed for many times.

Somebody reaching out their hand to offer comfort to someone so desperately in need of it.

A piece of bread --- or cup of juice being passed to us.

A prayer answered ----- a smile --- a break we've been waiting for.

Comforting news ---- something we've never really understood finally making sense.

Finally coming to the place where we can give things over to God instead of having to always know why?

And the list goes on and on.

Listening to Him --- listening to God ----- means hearing ---and paying attention to the little things that happen in life.

God gave an awesome display of power to get the attention of the disciples - -- or at least 3 of them ---- and then He ends the display abruptly saying --- "This is my son --- listen to Him."

Sometimes it's easy to get all caught up in life --- the demands and worries of life ----- such that we miss the voice of God speaking.

Clearly God felt He had to do something dramatic to get the attention of the disciples ----- a mountaintop --- Jesus in dazzling white --- the 2 greatest prophets of them all Moses and Elijah appearing.

Only to say ----- “This is my Son --- listen to Him.”

Simple ---- powerful words.

The disciples weren't listening to Jesus they were going they're own way ---
- expectations --- assumptions --- thinking they knew what Messiahship
looked like --- and suffering and rejection --- and death on a cross wasn't it.

But they were wrong ----- Jesus came to show a new way --- a different way.

A way of peace and patience --- and love and compassion ---- the way of the
still small voice of love.

Today the message from God is clear ----- this is my Son ---- listen to Him.

And so may our eyes ---- and our ears --- and our hearts --- be open to the
voice of Christ.

And may we be receptive and accepting of whatever it is that He has to say
to us.

For He is always worth listening to.

Amen