



**North Shore
Congregational
Church**
FOX POINT, WI

From the Pulpit...

“Cross-Eyed: Hearing”

Rev. Dr. Martin Hall – Preaching

Matthew 17: 1-9; 2 Peter 1: 16-21

February 15, 2026

In the liturgical calendar of the church, today, the Sunday before the start of Lent, is known as ‘Transfiguration Sunday.’ It is the day of the year in which we look to that story of Jesus grabbing Peter, James and John and taking them up to the top of that mountain, where Jesus is transformed into this glowing figure while Moses and Elijah – those prophets from old – suddenly appear at his side. It’s hard to relate to that moment for Peter, James and John. We didn’t walk along Jesus’ side as they did. We didn’t have the experience of his earthly presence as they did. Maybe that previous experience means they would have been a bit more steadied for such a moment than would we – but I can’t get my mind wrapped around that scene of standing beside my friend only to have his entire physical presence transformed and two ancient (and most notably long-deceased) people suddenly standing at his side. It’s all just a bit fantastical – and I can’t really put myself there to connect to that moment. I can, however, relate to what comes next.

As this vision unfolds and Peter finds himself looking at this shimmering Jesus and his two resurrected cohorts, Peter’s astonishment and awe turn to one need – to do something! In the presence of all of that glory and majesty, Peter’s immediate and natural response is to act. That part, I get! That embedded response to act on a situation or circumstance is something I have no trouble understanding – and I know I’m not alone in that. Many of us are ‘doers.’ When something doesn’t make sense, we want to figure out. When something isn’t working, we want to fix it. When something needs to be done, we want to do it. Now, we all have blind spots in our ‘doer-ness’ (dishes, lawn care, balancing the checkbook...), there’s a long list of those mundane and repetitious responsibilities that we are often more than ready to ignore. But on the larger scale, I think it is a common human trait for us to want to act on our moments of cognitive dissonance. When things fail to meet the mental constructs we bring to the moment, many of us are compelled, if not eager, to do something about it. Peter’s gut reaction of acting in that moment – building those tents – is a sensibility I understand.

While we didn’t read it this morning, I think that story of Mary and Martha is familiar to many of us. Martha is hurriedly getting things ready to host Jesus while Mary simply sits at Jesus’ feet. Martha gets progressively annoyed – doing all the work herself – until she finally blows up and asks Jesus to tell Mary to get off her lazy good-for-nothing rear and help. I get that. I get why Martha was feeling that way. I get why Martha reacted that way. I get why Martha was brought to the brink like that. I think a lot of us do. Jesus, of course, didn’t exactly respond in the way

Martha had anticipated. Jesus suggested that it was Mary who had chosen the better thing. Jesus suggested that just sitting and resting at his feet was the better option that day. Much like Peter in that moment of the transfiguration, Jesus pointed towards the fact that it wasn't a moment that was about doing, it was simply about being there. And, later on in the second letter of Peter, we get at least one suggestion as to why that being is sometimes more important than giving in to that predisposition to act.

For the sake of transparency, I think it's important that I name the indeterminant authorship of the second letter of Peter. Like a lot of the books of the Bible, we don't know for sure who wrote this text. Context and language make it clear that, if Peter wrote it, he likely did so just before his death. Most, however, think it is more likely written by a disciple or follower of Peter's offering it somewhat as a 'last testament' of Peter's teachings to be remembered in the Christian world. Whichever it is, however, the letter offers a reflection from Peter about that transfiguration moment. I'm starting in the sixteenth verse of the first chapter of second Peter.

For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we had been eyewitnesses of his majesty. 17 For he received honor and glory from God the Father when that voice was conveyed to him by the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased." 18 We ourselves heard this voice come from heaven, while we were with him on the holy mountain.

19 So we have the prophetic message more fully confirmed. You will do well to be attentive to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. 20 First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, 21 because no prophecy ever came by human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

I think there's a subtle, but truly fascinating, dynamic to this take on that moment of the transfiguration. Remember, Peter's initial response to that event was to do something – to be active – to engage in that moment in a way that had him tangibly responding to what it was that was happening around him. In the face of God's glory shining in and through the person of Jesus, and two long-dead faithful ancestors now standing before him on the top of this mountain – Peter literally wanted to construct something to somehow manage the grandeur of the moment. Now, decades later, Peter's legacy of that moment is not to act, to build, to respond, or to engage in any of those tangible ways, but is, much to the contrary, to encourage that we 'be attentive' to the light that God is trying to shine into our lives.

We need to listen! That's the short form, I think, of what we are getting in this lesson from 2 Peter. After decades of being able to reflect on that incomprehensible moment, the legacy that Peter leaves behind is that the doers among us sometimes need to quash that proclivity as our first reaction and, instead, respond to God's presence by listening. The trick, however, is that 'being attentive' implies listening, not hearing, and I would argue that those are two very different things.

Remember that age-old question, 'If a tree falls in the forest and no one is there to hear it, does it make a sound?' I've always felt that the clear answer to that question is yes. Because, there are

three stages to that process of sound playing out in our world. The first stage – the sound – stands independent of any discernment of it. Whether or not anyone is there to perceive it, the falling tree will cause those vibrations to pass through the air. That's the sound. So, yes, regardless of whether or not anyone or anything is around to perceive it, that falling tree makes a sound.

When those waves hit the ear, however, the sound has been heard. As those vibrations make their way from the outer to the inner ear, those waves are converted to neural signals sent to our brain that tell us that we have heard something. We may not know what it is (especially if it happened in the distance and all we have is some faint crackling or a subdued thud), but our brains are now telling us that the sound has been heard. The tree will always make the sound. If we're around, we will hear the sound. That still, however, doesn't mean we were listening.

A sound being created does not mean it is heard, and a sound heard does not mean that we are listening. To listen, we need to be attentive. To listen, we need to actively engage in what it is we are seeking to discern. To listen, we have to open ourselves to the unknown of what those sounds might be and what they may say to our lives.

I am convinced that we spend an inordinate portion of our lives hearing God, but not necessarily listening.

- Sometimes we are so convinced as to where the sound will come from that we end up looking in the thunder and the earthquake and never attune ourselves to the still small voice that echoes in the silence.
- Sometimes we are so pre-disposed to the voices that carry authority in our lives that we end up like the boy Samuel repeatedly running to Eli, convinced that Eli is the one speaking – continually missing out on the fact that it is God's voice he was hearing.
- Sometimes we are so convinced about what the message will be that we end up like Nicodemus, trying to figure out how a person could be literally and physically born from their mother's womb a second time.

For those who read my message in the February newsletter, you'll recall that I spoke about the challenge of discerning God in our lives and about my general principal that that which affirms our predisposition is often inversely correlated with the presence of God in that voice. The more that God's 'voice' comes from where we think it should, or says what we want it to say, or guides us where we want to be guided, the less likely it is that we are truly discerning God in that moment. It's not foolproof, to be sure, but the more affirming God's message is to our predispositions, the more likely it is that we are hearing and not listening.

We come to prayer looking for God to do what we want God to do. We come to Scripture looking for the ways in which it affirms and underlines the perspective we are hoping to articulate and/or defend. Day in and day out, often very subconsciously, we are ready to hear God, but we aren't nearly as ready to listen – to be attentive – to be drawn into that challenging, and sometimes even convicting, journey of discerning the truth of God's voice in that moment of our lives.

For these past four weeks, we have been exploring this notion of a ‘cross-eyed’ faith. We began with that fundamental notion of reframing our understanding of God, this world, and our place in it through the lens of the cross – through the lens of the grace, love and mercy of God shown to us in and through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. We moved on to that core notion that a cross-eyed faith understands that the cross is why we are in the faith. Our enacted faith is not the road toward salvation; it is the path that emerges from it. As Paul said, ‘God is why we are in Christ Jesus.’ Then, last week, we talked about that path that emerges from the cross and explored the idea that our paths are unique. That in given seasons, circumstances and moments, God has a purpose for each of us that is distinct from one to the next.

The culmination of this brief journey into our cross-eyed faith, then, lies in that reminder from 2 Peter. As we reframe our understandings, claim the hope that is already ours in the cross, and seek to know God’s purpose for us, we have to stop hearing and start listening. Our true understanding and following of this cross-eyed faith to which we are called lies in our willingness to be drawn into that challenging, and sometimes even convicting, journey of listening – of being fully and wholly attentive to the often unexpected truth of God’s voice in that moment of our lives.