

The 4 judges sit with their backs to the stage; expectant, focused, every fiber of their being is prepared to hear “the Voice.” A performer strides out hoping to be the one; she takes her place, inhales as she raises the microphone to her face, opens her mouth and sings. The judges listen with complete concentration; one by one, they press the button that swivels them around to face the stage signifying their willingness to coach the singer; they’ve heard that something that tells them she could win it all; she could be “the Voice.”

Transfiguration Sunday invites us to pay attention for God’s voice like those judges; to listen for what God has to say, and as we celebrate Girl Scout Sunday and the impact Scouting has on young women’s lives, to commit ourselves to the impact God’s word can have on our lives.

The Transfiguration offers God the Father’s confirmation that Jesus is God the Son: *2 Peter 1:17 (NRSV) 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.”*

Peter paid attention up on that mountain; he heard the voice, and he spent the rest of his life listening for it, because the Transfiguration confirmed not only that God the Son had come but also that he would come again in glory. Peter would hear that voice again, so until that day, he paid attention every day in the hope that this would be the day when he heard the voice.

On this Transfiguration and Girl Scout Sunday, we are invited to do the same; to live with a sense of energized anticipation that empowers us to pay attention, so that when the day comes (and it will come, the Son will return!), we will hear the voice.

#### ✦ The Voice to Listen For

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The Transfiguration puts a different spin on the promise of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming (in Greek *Parousia*) of Jesus Christ. It shifts it from being simply a solution to all our problems to being a summons to us to pay attention for Jesus’ voice in the here and now.

2 Peter is written to defend this promise because some time has passed since the resurrection; Jesus hasn't returned, and some were questioning if this promise was valid or if it was something that had been made up. Those early Christians were losing their edge and slackening in their devotion to Jesus Christ.

We've been wrestling with this ever since; Christ's second coming seems so far away, so what difference does it make how we live our lives? What promise can we cling to in tough times?

We've fallen into the trap of time. That was then, this is now. This is now, O Lord, when? We're listening to what our experience has to say. We're listening to what our expectations have to say. We're listening to experts and analysts, pundits and prognosticators, who whine and opine as they wonder what in the world are we listening for?

Listen for Jesus. Listen for the voice. We'll talk about how to do that in a minute, but the first step in listening for Jesus is learning to tune out all the lesser voices that aren't Jesus. *Matthew 17:5 (NRSV) "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!"*

Eternity steps into time at the Transfiguration; the Majestic Glory of God invades human history and the created order and in so doing, God's glory sets aside experience and expectation as ultimate authorities. Every voice that clamors for attention is put in its place in the presence of the One "who is coming to judge the living and the dead."

... [Fellowship] with God is the chief concern [of the Bible's teaching re: the second coming]. Divine transcendence overcomes the antithesis of the present and the future aspects of God's rule. The turning point has already come, and the *parousía* will be a definitive manifestation when God's eternal rule supersedes history. Christ is the resolution of the tension between this world and the next, hope and possession, concealment and manifestation, and faith and sight.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Kittel, G., Friedrich, G., & Bromiley, G. W. (1985). *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans.

All of which is to say that the voice of Jesus is not confined to 2000 years ago in Galilee and Jerusalem. He is not confined by the limitations of history; he is the defining event in history. We catch a glimpse of that on the Mount of Transfiguration in the sure and certain hope that there is more, much more to come.

Therefore, here and now, today and every today until the day, listen for Jesus. Listen for the voice!

✦ Listen for the Voice

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Listen and learn; read and remember. The Bible is God's word to us; God has something to say, and when we read the Bible, God will say it and the light in us will go on!

*2 Peter 1:19 (NRSV) 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.*

The Venerable Bede, a great Christian teacher who lived in England in the 8<sup>th</sup> century AD, wrote this: "In the night of this world, so full of dark temptations, where there is hardly anyone who does not sin, what would become of us if we did not have the lamp of the prophetic word? Will this word always be necessary? No. It is only necessary until the daylight comes. Right now we have a night lamp because we are children of God, and in comparison with the ungodly, we are the very daylight itself. But if we compare what we are now with what we shall be in the future, then we are still in the darkness and need this lamp. (on 2 Peter)"<sup>2</sup>

But how do we read the Bible and not read in to it? How can we overcome "the dark temptation" to use the Bible to justify our biases and bless our bigotry "in the night of this world"? We can do a lot of damage with a Bible, and Lord knows we Christians have done so!

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<sup>2</sup> In, *Ancient Christian Commentary: New Testament*, XI, ed. Gerald Bray. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000) 141.

*Proverbs 16:18 (NRSV) Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.* Pride goes before destruction, and it leads us into being destructive. So when we read the Bible, we do so with humility and expectation; expectation because the Voice speaks to us through Scripture; humility because it is the Voice of the One before whom “every knee will bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord.”

As John Calvin observed: [2 Peter] contains a true, godly, and useful doctrine, that then only are the prophecies read profitably, when we renounce the mind and feelings of the flesh, and submit to the teaching of the Spirit, ... the light which shines in [Scripture], comes to the humble alone.<sup>3</sup>

When we come to the Scripture with humility, we are open to the blessing God has for us; we are able to hear what the Voice has to say – the word that gives life direction, the word that inspires hope, the word that shines light into our darkness and the darkness of this world.

I heard a story recently about a man who went to see *La Boheme* at London’s Covent Garden Theatre in 1963. Italian tenor Giuseppe di Stefano was scheduled to play the lead, but shortly before the curtain went up, it was announced that his understudy would be playing the role.

As you might imagine, the crowd was not pleased, some left, and the man was about to join them, when the usher said to him. “Don’t leave. He’s better.”

The man stayed, and was among the first outside of Italy to hear the voice of Luciano Pavarotti.

Pavarotti said, “People think I’m disciplined. It is not discipline. It is devotion. There is a great difference.”

That difference is what the Transfiguration invites us to integrate into our lives. Read the Bible. Read it regularly, and pay attention! God has something to say! Listen for Jesus. Listen for the voice. Amen.

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<sup>3</sup> Calvin, J. (1998). *2 Peter: Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles* (electronic ed., 2 Pe 1:20). Albany, OR: Ages Software.