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Matthew 17:1-9

It's time that I let you in on a little secret. I have an incredibly type-A personality. That is to say that I always like to know and understand what's going on. I like to be in control. I like to be out in front of things. And when that's not possible, I start freakin' out a little bit. And be "freaking out" I mean I find ways to FEEL, at least, like I'm in the driver's seat.

I keep myself busy in thought and mind, busy in action and in motion, with activities and work and responsibilities. Just busy. And stressed. And busy, and stressed... To be clear, I don't recommend it.

However, I suspect that many of us are, in fact, stressed and busy much of the time. And if you're anything like me, daily stress and anxiety can become too large. It can start to take up too much headspace and heart space, and our need to be busy and in control all of the time means we miss out on the truly necessary, beautiful things while we're running around in a tizzy getting things done.

Well, we're not alone. We enter the gospel text this morning at a moment of anxiety, and confusion, and uncertainty, and fear.

Suddenly, without much prelude, we find ourselves on a mountain with Peter and James and John. Now, they've been traveling around with Jesus for a while and my guess is they're pretty sure they've got him pegged...

But now here they are. Up on this mountain, with absolutely no idea why. I can imagine them giving each other meaningful looks. "Do you know what's going on?" "No." "Do you?"

And then suddenly, in the middle of an already kind of strange outing, Jesus... Starts. Glowing.

Not glowing like a lightbulb, or shining like a Twilight vampire in the sun, but flashing. Like lightning. That's the vibe that Jesus is giving off. It's like lightning.

And as if that wouldn't be disorienting enough, now there's two really ancient guys with Jesus—Moses and Elijah. Who are like, a bajillion years old at this point (or ghosts, of course). So imagine being the disciples here... you've found yourself on a mountain for who knows what reason, and now you're staring at Moses, Elijah, and shiny lightning Jesus. It must have been terrifying! And exciting. And confusing as all get-out.

And so, what does Peter do? Does he take a moment to breathe in this sight? NOPE! Type-A Peter gets busy right away. We can picture him rushing toward Jesus saying, “Master, this is a magnificent moment. Let's build tents!”

Peter means well. He's trying to get a handle on what's going on here. He's trying to take control of a stressful situation. He wants to show hospitality to honored guests—Moses, Elijah, and Jesus. It's the best thing he can think to do in this stressful situation. But Peter hasn't been paying attention, and in all the excitement Peter has completely missed the point.

Jesus didn't come up here on this mountain to be locked up inside a tent, safely tucked away and under control. The light of Christ is meant to shine. The light of Christ belongs out in the world, and Peter... should have kept his mouth shut.

I think he realizes this about the time the big scary cloud rolls in and starts talking to him. Well, God starts talking to him.

And God says, "this is my son. The beloved. Listen. To. Him." This strikes me as the divine way of saying, "Peter. Your tent idea? It kind of stunk. In fact, a lot of your ideas are not so good. You know, you're busying yourself with all these things but they're not my things. It's like you haven't heard a word I've said, so... settle down for a second. Be still. Zip it. Listen up."

We're a lot like Peter, you know. Between work and home life, school, sports, activities, events, travels, meetings, and yes—even church—we're spread too thin. We're stressed, and anxious, and

busy beyond belief. Our lives are noisy and in our haste, we too are tent-builders, well-intentioned mark-missers like Peter. Often quick to speak, and slow to understand.

But today God says, “hush. I know there’s a lot going on around you and in you, and I know you’re busy trying to make sense of it all, but just hush. (pause) This is my son. My beloved. Listen. To. Him.”

How often do we really do that—listen? And what would happen if we did? I mean, would we get fancy light-up clothes like Jesus? ‘Cause that would be cool. I checked into it. The answer’s no. But something does happen when we zip it, and listen.

In the summer of 2011 I worked as a chaplain at Hopkins Bayview. And one afternoon I got to spend some time with a 90 year old woman who had been burned over most of her body, save her face. We’ll call her “Ms. A.” Now, because of the nature of her injuries the only thing Ms. A *could* do was talk, which meant the only thing I *could* do was listen. And so I listened as she told me the story of her

life. I listened for a long time—transfixed by what she had to say. And after I'd been with her for a while she stopped and she said, "you know, no one's really listened to me like this for a really long time. And then she smiled, and she laughed, and she said, "Lauren, I've gotta tell you something crazy. You remind me so much of my mother." And I smiled, but I was confused, because age issues aside, Ms. A was Black.

But she pressed on and said, "I've got a picture of her in my purse. It's from her 92nd birthday party. Why don't you go get it for me."

And so I did. And I looked at the picture, and I'll tell ya what... I did not look a thing like her mother. Not in the eyes, or the nose, or mouth. Not in the build. Definitely not in the skin tone. But Ms. A. She looked from the picture, to me, and back again, and said, "you just remind me so much of her. I'm glad you're here."

See, it was somewhere in the conversation, or in the simple act of listening, that a then 26 year old white girl became—for Ms. A.—the

spittin' image of her 92 year old Black mother. And it made us both glad.

When we still ourselves and listen we are opened up to being transformed. We take in what we hear and it becomes part of us. And so today on the mountaintop God says, "Hush. Be still. This is my son, the beloved. Listen to him, and I will make you shine."

Now, when Jesus was on the mountain and he was transfigured, he shone like lightning flashes. This transfiguration event ranks right up there with his birth, his baptism, and his resurrection. It's a revelation of Jesus as messiah, a revelation of his Christ-y-ness, and so it's a really big deal. We're not shootin' for that kind of glory here folks.

We're just people like Peter. Struggling to make sense of the world around us, to keep our heads above water. We're like Peter. We mess up. We put our feet in our mouths and the cart before the horse. We

are quick to speak and slow to understand. As Luther would say, we are mere worms.

The text tells us that when God speaks from the cloud the disciples fall to the ground. Worthless. Overwhelmed with fear. A sorry bunch of busybody people who in the face of their own failure can't even stand. Confused people who don't understand all this mystical stuff happening around them. And so they're speechless, scared people who have finally realized that they don't have it all figured out after all. Just like us. Right?

And so what do we do now?

Hush. Be still. And listen. Because Jesus is present even here. And he's speaking words that do transform us.

Jesus reaches out and touches us on the shoulder and says, "do. Not. Be. Afraid." In times of stress and anxiety, of fear and busyness, when we're faced with our own limits, when our present is unclear

and our future is even more unknowable, could there be any more comforting words in the universe than these—listen to them now—
Do. Not. Be. Afraid.

And notice that Jesus doesn't just speak these words, he touches us as well. The text tells us that "Jesus came and touched them [—the disciples]." The Greek word here is *absamanos*, which can mean to touch, but it can also mean "to ignite." To light up.

We hear the words of Jesus today—do not be afraid—and they're like lightning bolts to our hearts. They hit us, they get inside of us, they light us up and lighten our load. They pick us up off the ground we've been driven into and cause us to shine.

So imagine if we were still, and listened more often. How might we be transformed? Imagine if we listened for Jesus not just in scripture or in sermons (though that's an awfully good place to start) but also in conversations over coffee and in between the lines of the news articles we read. Imagine if we listened for Jesus in the voices of our

children, in the wisdom of our elders, and in friend and enemy and stranger alike.

Imagine if we slowed down and listened for Jesus not only in church but also in the clouds and the stars and the trees. How might we be transformed? And might it be time and time and time again? Might just a little bit of Jesus' shine get into us?

And perhaps, when someone looks at you, they would see the shining face of Christ instead. I believe this is possible. I believe this is the transformative power of the gospel, spoken into our lives. I believe this is the power of God with us—Emmanuel. Jesus.

Winston Churchill once said, “we are all worms. But I do believe I'm a glow worm.” I do believe Jesus transforms us all into glow worms. So hush. Be still. Listen up. And shine on. Amen.