

The Final Journey – Questions Along the Way: Listen or Talk? Matthew 17:1-9 3-8-20

It is not always easy to know when to talk and when to listen. Maybe you struggle with that. It happens a lot in marriages. Dr. David Ludwig tells us that there are two different types of people. One group he calls pointers. These are the people who use few words and get right to the point. The first thing they say is usually the most important. Then there are the painters. These are people who have to paint a picture. The last thing they say is usually the most important point they want to make. Painters want the other person to listen to them. Pointers want to jump in and try to fix the problem before the Painter is done Painting.

I think Jesus' Disciple Peter was a Pointer. This may have created some very interesting situations in his family life if his wife was a painter. Peter was usually the first to speak whenever the opportunity presented itself. Like most Pointers I know, Peter needed to learn how to listen. The letter of James in the New Testament tells us, "Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires." (James 1:19-20)

Last week we started our series about questions that are raised by Jesus' final journey to the cross. The journey began at Caesarea Philippi when Jesus asked the Disciples, "Who Do People Say I Am?" Then He asked them, "Who Do You Say I Am?" Peter jumped right in and said "You Are The Christ, The Son Of The Living God."

Everything was good up to this point. The Disciples expected Jesus, as the Promised Savior, to take on the evil in their world. They expected it to happen the way people usually do it, through violent resistance and a triumphant victory. They expected Jesus to lead a revolution to drive out the Romans and set Israel free.

But when Jesus told the Disciples that he was going to Jerusalem where he would be killed and be raised from the dead on the third day, Peter went ballistic and said that this must never happen. Jesus told Peter, "Get away from me, Satan! You are a dangerous trap to me. You are seeing things merely from a human point of view, not from God's." (Matthew 16:23) I think the pointer got the point. Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem on an urgent mission to take on evil in an unexpected way. The way Jesus would defeat evil was the way of the cross.

Jesus gave the Disciples a new vision when He said, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow me." (16:24) This was a cross cultural vision of how Jesus and His followers will change the world. Rather than vengeance and violence, Jesus' Disciples are told to follow His example, dying to their own desires. It is about trusting God and loving those opposed to us. It requires that we remain connected to Christ and draw our strength from Him.

Jesus' new vision was connected to the past. Six days after Peter's confession of faith, Jesus took Peter, James and John to a mountain top with Him. These three men were the inner circle of Jesus' Disciples. The event that took place on the mountain top is called the transfiguration because they saw Jesus in a whole new light. Matthew tells us, "Jesus' appearance was transformed so that his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as light." (vs. 2) Moses, who was given the Ten Commandments, and the great prophet Elijah appeared with Jesus. They remind us that Jesus came to keep the Law for us and to fulfill the promises God had given through His Prophets. Jesus is greater than Moses and Elijah.

Peter could not keep his big mouth shut. So he offered to build three tents, one each for Moses, Elijah and Jesus. Peter still didn't get it. He wanted to stay on the mountain top with Jesus instead of going down the Mountain and continuing the journey to Jerusalem and the cross. So God the Father spoke from the cloud that covered the mountain and said, "This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy. Listen to him." (vs. 5)

Peter was told to listen. Things were not great in Israel at the time of Jesus. The Romans occupied the land and could force people to do anything they wanted. The religious elite did more to control the people than to help them. Taxes were high and incomes were low. Peter wanted to have things done his way.

Isn't that the challenge that we face too. We need to learn to listen to Jesus more and talk less. It is so easy for us to tell God what we want, what we think He should do or how He should work things out. It is too easy for us to complain when things go wrong and wonder how God could let this happen to us and to other people. That is why we need to learn to listen.

But more than just listen, we need to follow Jesus and trust Him. Jesus told Peter, James and John to "get up and not be afraid." Fear can paralyze us. Jesus' love overcomes fear. He tells us to get up. He is with us. He will help us overcome our fears.

Then Jesus led the Disciple down the mountain. They couldn't stay on the mountain top if Jesus was going to fulfill His mission. They couldn't stay on the mountain top if they were going to follow Him. Jesus doesn't want us to settle for a life of isolation from others. He doesn't want us to keep our faith locked inside the church doors. He leads us into the world, to engage the people around us who need to be set free from sin and all of sin's devastating consequences.

Because so many people had false expectation for the Promised Savior, Jesus told Peter, James and John "Don't tell anyone what you have seen until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead." (vs. 9) Jesus didn't want to start a riot. He didn't want to lead a revolt against Rome. He needed to fulfill His mission before everyone else would know. The Disciples needed more time to listen to Him and to understand His mission.

Their time would come to tell everyone about Jesus. That time came after His death and resurrection. Before Jesus returned to heaven He told the Disciples, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)

There is a time to listen and time to talk. Not only do we need to learn to listen to God’s voice, read the words of Jesus in the Gospel and take them to heart. We also need to listen to the people around us, to get to know them and their stories. If we listen to them as they paint their stories, we may be able to point them to Christ.