

When I was in middle school I somehow ended up on our school's Science Olympiad team, despite the fact that science wasn't particularly my jam and practices happened during the same time that I had volleyball practice. When I think about it now, the concept seems kind of fun, but at the time my younger self was mostly annoyed at having to juggle the responsibility. The whole idea was essentially like the Olympics for middle school science. There were different events and your team had to decide who was going to compete in which ones. I vaguely remember having to do something with forensics where I had no clue what was going on, but the one that I remember vividly was an event called "Write It, Do It." It was in that moment that I realized, the practices probably would have been helpful.

On the face of it, the task seemed simple, my partner Anna went into a room and was given a model essentially that she had to write a description of how to build. She had to write down precise instructions for me to follow so that when my turn came, I could come in and faced with all the disconnected component parts I could put them back together to make the original model. I went in, and the irony now with how much I love doing Legos, was a massive pile of Legos in just total disarray, and I had...absolutely no clue what do to with them. Her instructions felt like another language. For the life of me, I don't remember what it was supposed to look like, all I know is

that whatever I built, it wasn't what it was supposed to be. My partner had definitely written it, but I was incapable of doing it. It was awful, especially for a straight A kid like me. I couldn't understand what was in front of me, and as much as my partner had tried to explain it, the communication just wasn't happening.

Now, I don't really know what really went down on that mountain of Transfiguration, but I have a feeling that Peter, James, and John felt at least a little bit like I did sitting at that table trying to figure out what was going on around me. Maybe I needed some of Peter's instincts, just build a tent! Build a house! Anything to make sense of what was happening. For as much as I realized in that moment that I needed to have gone to practice, God lets these three know what they should have spent their time doing, what they needed to spend their time doing...listening.

After this elongated season of Epiphany, we find ourselves nearing the end of a journey, while also on the cusp of another one beginning. Up until this point in Luke, things have been...if not calm, at least understandable. Jesus has been teaching and healing and they've been traveling around to different parts of Galilee, and sure there has been some trouble here and there, but for the most part, they've just been helping people. But now...well, our gospel jumps us in at an odd starting point.

Luke says, “Eight days after these things were said...” and we’re left to wonder, what things? Why are they relevant to what is about to happen? Well, those things just happen to be Jesus’ first Passion prediction.

A little over a week before Jesus takes these three up the mountain, he has sat all the disciples down and told them what all of this is for, why they have been doing the work that they have been doing and to say that it’s not what they were expecting is a bit of an understatement. Jesus tells them that this work has only one end point, arrest, being jailed, being killed. He tells them about the promise of the resurrection, but when you’ve just heard that your best friend, your partner in ministry, your friend is going to die, you don’t really hear anything else. Jesus then tells them that they are to take their cue in life from him, to take up their crosses and follow him, to put in the hard work of ministry that can be not only thankfulness but extremely dangerous and ultimately they’re going to have to do it without him there by their sides anymore. It leaves them all shocked, stunned, and silenced, so it’s no wonder that we don’t know what happens during the intervening eight days before the Transfiguration. It’s like they all needed time to go to their own respective corners and think about what they’d heard.

So here we are, a week later and Peter, James, and John are following Jesus up a mountain and have to be wondering after everything that has

happened what could possibly come next. Why are they hiking? Why aren't the others coming? What *else* could Jesus possibly have to tell them? Well, it turns out Jesus doesn't have something to tell them, God does. In a haze of overwhelmed, sleepiness most likely caused by the Holy Spirit, the three of them experience the ancient equivalent of coming out of anesthesia. They aren't sure what's going on, what they have witnessed, or why. They see Jesus, aglow with light, transformed and talking with two men that they instinctively know are Moses and Elijah, both pillars of prophecy, examples of God's overwhelming presence with God's people. Once they fully wake up, Peter rambles on about building tents and trying to make sense of what they've just experienced, and into that chaos, the voice of God breaks through just as it did at Jesus' baptism. A voice rings out, "This is my Son, my Chosen...listen to him." And then just like that, it's over and they're left stunned and amazed, trying to figure out what they have just seen and heard.

You have to imagine there is a lot of baffled silence as they come down the mountain, a lot of whispers, a lot of starts of sentences that never get finished. At some point, they decide together that they can't tell anyone what has happened, not until they have figured out what it all means.

Somewhere along the way, as the mountain makes way to the valley, it penny has to drop...God told us to listen to him. God told us that Jesus is

the chosen one. All of this is real, all of this has meaning, all of this is happening. We have to listen to him...which means we have to remember what he told us eight days ago...we have to remember what he has been telling us all this time...we...have some work to do.

Of all the things that God could have chosen to tell these three in this moment, the fact that all it boils down to is that they have to listen illuminates the importance, the permanence of everything Jesus has been telling them, and imagine how overwhelming that has to be for the disciples to realize. They have to listen to the Passion prediction, which means they have to listen to the fact that Jesus is going to die, which means they have to listen to the fact that at some point they are going to be the ones running this ministry, preaching this gospel, which means at some point, their crosses are the ones that are going to need to be born.

And it isn't just the Passion prediction. These words of God, listen to him, are going to ring in their ears when Jesus, a few days later, tells the Parable of the Good Samaritan. Listen to him...everyone...*everyone* is our neighbor, *everyone* is deserving of mercy and care. And then a few more weeks later when Jesus tells them not to worry, to consider the lilies, to trust that God loves them and knows every last hair on their head, so fear cannot dictate their ministry. The months go on and Jesus tells them of the cost of

discipleship, that they are going to face ridicule, that their path is going to be hard, they are going to have to listen. When Jesus tells them all those days and weeks later, the parables of lost things, of sheep and coins and God never giving up on anyone, but insisting on going out and bringing the lost home, even the prodigal son, they are going to realize they are listening to a message that says that everyone is deserving of a place in the kingdom, of being found, of not being allowed to wander lost, that every precious child of God is worth the effort of grace and love. This is my Son, the Chosen, listen to him...

But what do we hear today? What do we hear God saying in 2025? What is God calling us to listen to as we stand on the cusp of our Lenten journey that will ask us to not only follow Jesus, but follow him all the way to the cross and the empty tomb? When we hear the words of the gospel, what do we hear? And even more than that, when we hear them, do we listen? Or do we twist them to say what we want to hear, what will make us comfortable or better yet, *keep* us comfortable, within our neatly organized, sensible lives that don't ask us to risk reputation, voice, or time for the sake of our neighbor? I think more often than not, the words of the gospel go in one ear and out the other, unless it's something that we want to hear, something that doesn't challenge us and only brings us comfort. We don't

want to hear the uncomfortable and we certainly don't want to listen to it, because the uncomfortable is the stuff that calls us out into the world to actually do the work. We can understand the desire to stay on the mountain and build some houses because that's comfortable, that's safe, that doesn't involve hearing the hard. Do we think the disciples wanted to hear that Jesus was going to die? That they were going to have to put in the work? Absolutely not, but they did. It took work and dedication and time, but they did it, even though it was hard.

People of God, we have been given instructions. We have heard the words of God for more years that we can even process, and yet we have to ask, have we *listened*? Have we seen the instructions, but are staring at them like they're jibberish, certain that the only thing we know how to build is a world centered on us, not the one that God has laid out for us to build, one built on a foundation of justice, grace, love, and radical inclusion. For James, for John, for Peter, coming down the mountain meant listening to something different for each of them, and for us it means the same thing. We each have that thing we know we don't want to listen to God or Jesus about. We want to ignore it, we want to rewrite the instructions, and yet the word comes from the mountain today and always, you follow my Son, I have chosen him, I have chosen you, the time has come to listen. **AMEN!!!**