

Sermon
Community United Methodist Church of Coeur d'Alene
Transfiguration Sunday
February 15, 2026
9:30 AM

Text: Matthew 17:1-9

Theme: Glory Revealed

[opening prayer]

My first year in seminary, I was required to participate in a spiritual formation seminar. We would meet weekly in small groups led by a local clergyperson who would guide us through various spiritual practices. My small group leader was a Methodist pastor who was skilled at teaching stillness before God. Early on he taught us a simple breath prayer. Inhale: *Lord Jesus Christ, lamb of God*. Exhale: *Have mercy on me, a sinner*. I would sit in the silence of the Divinity School's chapel before the morning prayer service and breath in and out, silently turning that prayer over and over in my mind. *Lord Jesus Christ, lamb of God, have mercy on me, a sinner*.

Observing silence, practicing silence, became a cornerstone of my spiritual formation. That first year of seminary was a crucible of stress. The pressure to perform and prove ourselves worthy of our callings to ministry felt immense. We were constantly receiving feedback from our professors and mentors, boards of ordained ministry, and even from each other. In the cacophony of voices speaking over us, it was easy to lose track of the one voice that mattered most: God's.

It was God's voice that had called us there. And it was God's voice that would sustain us through the ups and downs of ministry long after we graduated. So, it was necessary to learn how to clear space in our souls for the practice of deep spiritual listening, otherwise we could lose all sense of why we were there and what we were doing. The practice of keeping silence before God was essential for distilling truth out of all the other noise in our lives.

It is hard enough to distinguish truth from the people who have some right or privilege to speak into our lives, like our family, friends, and faith communities.

But then there are all the other people, people we may not even know, sharing their opinions about how we should dress, eat, exercise, spend our time, spend our money, raise our families, vote, even think. And all this noise is overlaid by a miasma of fear and uncertainty, even despair, at the great shifts that are occurring in our culture, government, and religious institutions.

So much noise. And somewhere lost in all of that is God's voice. You may wonder, "Why doesn't God speak like God spoke in biblical times? Why doesn't God just make Himself heard – speak to us through a burning bush or a pillar of fire or a bright cloud from heaven?"

I submit: What makes us think we'd listen?

Good listening skills begin with an appreciation and tolerance for silence. A Christian who listens well understands that silence can be a sacrament – something holy and set apart, a means of encountering God's grace. But so often we rush to fill the silence between ourselves and God.

Just prior to their pilgrimage up the Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus turns to his disciples and he asks perhaps the single most important question in the Gospels: "Who do you say that I am?" (Matt 16:15 NRSVUE). Peter responds promptly: "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God" (v. 16). And Jesus is so pleased by Peter's confession that he calls him blessed and appoints him the rock on which he will build his church. Briefly, Peter's faith in Jesus transcends all the confusion and doubt and noise surrounding Jesus's ministry. That clarity doesn't last long, though. When Jesus begins to foretell his suffering, death, and resurrection, Peter rebukes him. "God forbid it, Lord!" (v. 23). Jesus responds by calling Peter "Satan" and a "hindrance" to Jesus's ministry (v. 24).

Peter was never very good at listening, but *ouch* – that had to have stung. I imagine Jesus's harsh words are clanging around Peter's head as they set off on their hike. Jesus leads Peter, James, and John up the mountain, and when they reach the summit, something unexpected happens. Jesus is transformed before them. The glory of God radiates from his body. One interpreter writes that Jesus "slipped off the human skin and let the God bones show through."¹ He lets the

¹ <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/transfiguration-sunday/transfiguration-sunday-year-a-lectionary-planning-notes/transfiguration-sunday-year-a-preaching-notes>

God bones show through and in that moment the disciples know beyond a shadow of a doubt that Jesus is more than a rabbi with some good ideas and a few miracles up his sleeve. He is God's Anointed One. And in case they had any doubts, Moses and Elijah, two pillars of the Jewish faith, appear next to Jesus and begin talking to him. Here is proof that in Jesus both the Law and the Prophets are being fulfilled.

The disciples are stunned, overcome by what they are seeing. James and John are silent, but Peter sees an opportunity to redeem himself. He offers to construct three dwellings: one for Moses, one for Elijah, and one for Jesus. Peter likely had in mind the Tabernacle, a portable structure that housed the divine presence before the Temple was constructed.

But before Peter can finish his thought, God interrupts him. "This is my Son, the Beloved," God declares. "With him I am well pleased" (v. 5). The same words God spoke from heaven at Jesus's baptism, the same declaration of divine love and affirmation, only He qualifies them with the following command: "Listen to him!"

Listen to him. It's a simple command, but it fills the disciples with fear. Why?

I think it is because the disciples realize that they have fundamentally misunderstood who Jesus is. And now that they have caught a glimpse of the truth, it scares them. Their eyes are open and they begin to grasp just how serious this call to discipleship is. They are not just following someone who teaches *about* God; they are following the Son of God, and his words are authoritative...including his words about suffering and death. The gravity of this revelation is beginning to sink in.

"Listen to him!" God tells the disciples. God knows what awaits Jesus and his followers at the base of that mountain: a long, slow march toward a different mountain, the mount of crucifixion. "If any want to become my followers," Jesus said, "let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me" (Matt 16:24). Soon only Jesus's words, and the sight of him transfigured as the Son of God, will remain when they see him handed over to the authorities and nailed to the cross.

What will sustain Jesus through the experience of his death? What will sustain the disciples? A declaration of love and a simple instruction: “This is my Son, the Beloved...listen to him.” God tells Jesus and tells us who Jesus is, and then God tells us how to respond to that revelation. The world will try to give us other visions, other instructions, but this revelation is the only vision we must carry in our hearts and minds: That Jesus is the Son of God, God’s incarnate Word. His life and death and resurrection will show us the way through the valley of the shadow of death. If we shape ourselves around the Word, if we let it take root and grow inside us, if we allow it to transfigure our hearts and minds, then we have nothing to fear from this world.

The silence we keep in the presence of God is the very beginning of this process of spiritual transfiguration. “Who do you say that I am?” Jesus asks. God wants to reveal Himself to us. But we cannot know who God is unless we are willing to be quiet before God and listen for what God has to say. We cannot know who we are, who *God says* we are, unless we are intentional about creating space in our lives away from all the other noise pressing in on us – space where we can hear God’s Spirit speaking directly to our spirits. If the only place we are able or willing to carve out space for God’s voice is in church on Sunday mornings, then we are missing out on the full scope of discipleship. Discipleship is making God the most important voice in our lives, allowing it to penetrate every corner of our existence.

In a few days’ time we will descend this shining Mount of Transfiguration into the darkness of Lent. We will journey with Jesus toward Jerusalem, toward his inevitable death. And we will carry with us many things: our fear, our pain and suffering, our grief and sadness. We will carry our questions, our despair for ourselves and the world, our anger, and our sin. What will sustain us on this journey? Whose voice will be strongest in our lives: God’s voice or the world’s?

This Lent, I encourage you to carve out space in your life for silence. You can start small – just a few minutes a day – but make it a priority. Listen closely for God. What truth is He commanding you to live into? What thoughts or actions is He calling you to repent of? What words of love is He speaking over you? Let the silence teach you, heal you, transfigure you. Let it lead you deeper in discipleship.

It has been said that to listen for God in worship and prayer is greater than listening to any man or woman preach. Our scripture lesson today is certainly an endorsement of that statement. So, with that said, I am going to end my sermon here and we are going to observe the sacrament of silence as our response to the Word. I invite you to assume a posture of prayer or meditation. Close your eyes or soften your gaze – whichever is most comfortable for you – and open your ears. Tune your heart to the movement of God’s Spirit in this place.

“The LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him” (Hab 2:20).