

Matthew 17:1-9 – Transfiguration

Feb. 23, 2020

Grace and peace be with you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Does anyone here love a good mystery? Novel or movie?

I'm a huge fan of a "good" mystery, and by "good" I mean one that has a surprising twist at the end. If I've already figured out who the murderer is ½ through the book, I get really bored, and then I get really irritated when I find out I got it right. I want a shock!

For some reason, it has become quite popular to tell you in the very beginning who the murderer is. Why? That takes all of the fun out of it, doesn't it?

Have you seen the movie, "Knives Out"? They tell you in the very beginning who the murder is. That's so annoying!

Although, I do have to admit, I had forgotten about that until the commentary after the movie when director tells everyone about how he told us in the first 5 minutes who murderer was.

When I heard that, I was really disappointed. I felt duped and had to replay the whole thing in my head. I wanted to yell at the screen, "That's not the way a mystery works! You can't tell us in the beginning who the murderer is!" But, in the middle of the movie I had forgotten. Perhaps we hope that people will change.

But, when it comes to a mystery, I want a real one. I want something like a good ole Agatha Christie novel. She was always really good about surprising you. She laid out the story just right. Perhaps you have read, "And then there were none." It was also called, "12 little Indians."

That was the first Agatha Christie book I ever read. I grew up on Nancy Drew, but Agatha Christie is the big leagues, and that book is sooo good! I couldn't put it down. I love that book. No one ever sees that ending coming! And if you saw the movie, you have to read the book, because they totally messed up the entire story with that movie – totally and completely! It makes me mad every time I think about it!

But, anyway... suffice to say, I love a good mystery.

And, here is something kind of interesting about the word “mystery.” The English word comes from the Greek word *mysterion*, and the Greek word *mysterion* is a derivative of a “shut mouth.” As in – you can’t say anything....

Jesus tells the disciples on many occasions, including in today’s Gospel, not to say anything – to keep their mouths shut – what they are witnessing is a mystery - that is until the resurrection.

“Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.” Tell no one – this is still a mystery. You don’t have the full picture.

A mystery is only a mystery until you get to the end of the story. Once you’ve read the end of a mystery novel or watched the end of a mystery movie, it’s no longer a mystery to you, because you know who did it.

For the disciples, what they saw on the mountain was a mystery. It was a mystery, because they didn’t know the rest of the story. They didn’t know how it was going to end. Granted, like in “Knives Out,” they were told what was going to happen in the very beginning, but they still couldn’t comprehend it. And, so Jesus tells them to keep quiet. Keep the mystery until you know the full story, until it’s no longer a mystery.

When I was in Guyana, the missionary there liked to say, “God gave you two ears and one mouth so that you can listen twice as much as you talk.”

Listening is important. Very important. So important that God tells the disciples, and us, to constantly listen to Jesus. Always listen to Jesus, because without Jesus it’s all a mystery, and because it’s a mystery, our mouths are shut.

But, with the good news of the resurrection, our mouths have been set free to share the good news. The transfiguration then becomes no longer a mystery, but news, good news for all time.

Without the resurrection, the transfiguration makes no sense, it’s a mystery, but when we know that Jesus is risen from the dead, we come to realize that Jesus is the fulfillment of the law and prophets – Moses, being the one who gave the law, and Elijah, the most important prophet in Judaism.

You may remember two weeks ago, in Matthew 5:17, Jesus said, ““Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill.” And so he has a meeting with Moses and Elijah on the mountain before he heads into Jerusalem and to the cross.

His closest disciples get to see it so that what happens to Jesus will not be a mystery to them. They'll know the full story.

On the mountain, they also get to see Jesus as he really is – God's glory – that's why he's all shiny. God is always in the light, and glory basically means light. Jesus is God's light.

They also get to hear God say, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!" Listen to him. Two ears. One mouth.

God doesn't say go do anything. God just says, "Listen to him." Listen. Understand. And then go and do.

Listen to Jesus. Understand that it's all about the resurrection. And then go and do something – go and share that good news.

But, people are funny. They like to go and do things right away. Lutherans are notorious for that. Episcopalians, in my experience, seem to like to spend more time listening, but Lutherans have got to go and do, even before they really know what's going on. We're a lot like Peter.

Oh, we've got guests, let me build you a nice little hut to stay in for a while. Let me get you some cookies and coffee. Sit down. Make yourself comfortable.

But, Jesus doesn't have time for that. He's heading into Jerusalem where he will be killed, and rise on the third day. Jesus is the one who has things to do. Right now he just needs the disciples to witness and listen, so that after the resurrection it won't all be a mystery anymore. They will understand what God is doing.

God's most loved child is going to die so that everyone else can become God's beloved children. God is doing that, not us. God is acting. And so, we too, need to stop and listen. We first need to hear that before we do anything at all.

We need to listen to Jesus say, "I'm doing this for you so that you will know how much you are loved." Unless we understand that, we can't do what God wants us to do.

So, we need to hear that we are loved two times more than the 1 time we act. For every 1 hour of action, we need two hours of listening to God.

Most of the time we probably think, I've got this, I get it, and we rush out and do something, but what if we spent more time first listening and discerning what God is saying before we act?

What if we sat in God's love before we did anything at all? Sounds like an interesting experiment, doesn't it? So, let's give that a shot this Lent and see what happens.

As you may or may not realize, today is the last Sunday before Lent. Before we go into the 40 days of wilderness and head toward the cross, we remember who Jesus really is. We remind ourselves that he is the beloved and that he will be resurrected from the dead for our sake. Lent is a great time to listen to that good news over and over again.

This year, you are invited to participate in the Way of Love. The Way of Love is a way to live intentionally in God's love in our everyday lives. There are 7 parts to The Way of Love. They are – turn, learn, pray, worship, bless, go, rest.

You'll notice that there are 4 listening items and 2 doing items. Turning, learning, praying, and worship are all ways we listen to Jesus. Blessing and going are ways we respond to God's good news. Turning, learning, praying, and worshipping are God's word coming to us, and blessing and going are how we take that good news out into the world. Two ears. One mouth.

You'll notice that there is a 7th one that I have left out – rest. Rest is just that – no activity – just sitting in the wonder of God's love. It's not active at all. And it's wonder, not mystery, because we know the whole story. We know Christ risen from the dead,

But, just because we know the whole story, doesn't mean we don't need to turn, learn, pray, and worship. On the contrary, that's how we get to know God better and can further discern where God is calling us to act in the world. We can't act without first listening.

So, come to worship on Ash Wednesday. That's the most basic way to turn, to make the commitment to observing Lent this year. We are just animated dust and without God we are nothing. Without that humility, we can't go forward in learning, praying, worshipping, blessing, and going. And we can't truly find rest without it as well. The only place we can truly find rest is in knowing God's love for us.

In Christ, God reveals God's self to us. It's no mystery at all. So, listen to Jesus. God is love.

Thanks be to God. Amen.