

“Listen to Him!”

Both the Scripture and the Youth Skit provide important insight into the nature of a special mountaintop experience – what it means to have a close relationship with our Divine Parent and God’s Only Son. For example, in the Skit, one of narrators pointed out, **“Everybody who has a mountain top experience must come down, and that is not always as easy as it seems.”** Coming back to earth, so to speak, you and I are changed but what does that transformation look like? Obviously, we are not transfigured as Jesus was. His face and clothing shone brightly!

So, how are we changed by our experiencing a close encounter – a mountaintop type of experience of God’s Presence? A crucial part of the answer to the question is what such a moment teaches us about our Maker and about how we are to respond to the Almighty breaking in to our lives. It just so happens, the voice from the cloud, which was clearly understood as that of the Divine Parent, provided us a very important clue about the way we need to change – how we are to relate to God and Jesus – the Son of God. The Reading reported in **verse 5**, *“While he was talking [meaning Peter], a shining cloud came over them, and a Voice from the cloud said, ‘This is My Own Dear Son, with whom I am pleased — listen to him!’”* Listening to the Divine Parent’s Son means we take what Jesus said very seriously! Our lives are transformed! We follow the agape love Jesus told us to live and which he actually lived.

To help us better understand what listening to Jesus means, let’s take a moment to watch the following video, which is titled, “Are You Listening?” [Please show the “*Are You Listening?*” video.]

Why is it important to listen to Jesus? The video specifically urged us to listen to God. Interestingly enough, in this case – the Transfiguration of Jesus, the Divine Parent wants us to listen to and follow God’s Own Dear Son – Jesus. Further, much of what Jesus said and did is very much in line with what the video shared as what the Still Speaking God said, especially as recorded in Old Testament Scriptures. **Unfortunately, what the video pointed out as God’s Message – the Divine Parent’s Love for us and Invitation to live in a special Relationship with our God is often lost or forgotten.** Throughout history, many organized religions and societies have painted an entirely different picture of how one is loved and welcomed by God. Yes, many have portrayed God’s Love for us as conditional and/or as one, which must be earned, instead of it being the Almighty’s Gift of Grace – Unmerited Forgiveness. Jesus declared and revealed God’s Grace and Unconditional Agape Love for us in the most convincing way possible – he embodied it!

An example of this came very quickly after God called Peter, James, and John to “listen” to God’s Son, Jesus. Our Scripture reported in **verses 6-7**, *“When the disciples heard the voice, they were so terrified that they threw themselves face downward on the ground. Jesus came to them and touched them. ‘Get up,’ he said. ‘Don’t be afraid!’”* Instead of threatening the Wrath of God, Jesus comforted them and quelled their fear by touching them, telling them to not be afraid, and directing them to go forward – to “get up”.

The Youth Skit revealed some of that truth when the Narrators said, “Maybe being with Jesus is like having those mountain top experiences. Maybe it even means being able to survive the rotten experiences when you come down to reality. Jesus tries to help us experience goodness, even if we’re not waiting for it.”

Since the first thing Jesus said to his disciples after the Voice spoke was, “Get up. Don’t be afraid!”, he made it clear the Agape Love he manifested overcomes fear. Given that, let’s watch this video, which illustrates the emotional and psychological struggle one experiences in the matters of fear and love. [The “*FearvsLove*” video was shown.]

Jesus had plenty to fear but, instead, he repeatedly demonstrated agape love! He was constantly under attack by the religious elite – the Pharisees, the Teachers of the Law, the Sadducees, and the Chief Priest. He, eventually, also found himself endangered by the civil authorities – the Herodians and the Romans. As we face hardships and difficulties – reasons to be afraid, Jesus tells us to not be afraid! Yes, you and I have health scares and one day will eventually die. We lose loved ones, experience problems at work, and may even face

public conflict, rejection, and ridicule but Jesus comforts us and overcomes our fears as he touches us, tells us to not be afraid, and calls to get up and move forward.

During Jesus' last night with his disciples, we find another example of the Divine Parent Speaking through God's Son, Jesus. In Matthew 26, Jesus took his disciples with him to the Garden of Gethsemane. He left most of his disciples in one spot, and then, he took the same three disciples from the Transfiguration – Peter, James, and John ahead to another spot in the garden. He went further by himself to pray. The three had great difficulty following his instructions to keep alert, while he prayed. Jesus told them to **“Keep watch”**. He found them asleep three times in conjunction with his passionate prayer time and then he said, **“Are you still sleeping and resting? Look! The hour has come for the Son of Man to be handed over to the power of sinful men. Get up, let us go. Look, here is the man who is betraying me!”** In the midst of his being betrayed, Jesus called his three closest disciples to recognize – to “Look!” They were to “Look!” – recognize the beginning of his fulfilling of his ultimate purpose – the demonstration of his and God's commitment and sacrifice in God's Agape Love for his death would soon be at hand. Indeed, as followers of Jesus, who “Listen” to him and follow his example, we are not merely to celebrate and declare God's Agape Love for us and all people, as shown in Jesus Christ. We are to also live that same agape love – to sacrifice – to be committed – to helping others be liberated from their bondage of alienation from God – to welcoming everyone with God's Agape Love – to resist fears, hate, prejudice, injustice, oppression, rejection, violence, and despair – and to declare liberty and freedom from all those fears, forces, and powers of evil and death!

In the words of the Narrators and Characters of the Youth Skit, “Jesus wants us to act differently in the future, not just talk about the past. . . . Like being more caring to your friends . . . Like becoming a referee for the little kids next season . . . Like trying to get along better with your folks . . . Like being a teacher someday”. One of the Narrators reminded us, “If Jesus can pick a bunch of fishermen or Texas youth like us, he can pick you, too!”

Each of us has many opportunities to join Jesus in agape loving and resisting evil and death. Indeed, some of us see the treatment of immigrants, as an important issue, which is worthy of commitment to agape love and justice. For example, the outgoing President of the South Central Conference of the United Church of Christ, who is also the Pastor of Friends Congregational UCC in College Station, Rev. Dr. Dan Deleon, made these observations, “Recently, there have been raids carried out by Immigration and Customs Enforcement. The immigrant community — our neighbors — are being ‘rounded up’ to be deported. Those being targeted are people who have been convicted or even accused of a crime (for example, an unpaid parking ticket), and those with expired visas. This affects 40 percent of the immigrant population. Plus, even if you're not being targeted, you can still be detained.”

Rev. Deleon continued, “Husbands and fathers are going to work at the construction site and not coming home. Children get home from school to find their mother gone. Couples are taking two cars to church on Sunday in case one parent gets picked up, so the other will be able to stay and care for the kids and ailing parent.” Dr. Deleon concluded, “These injustices offend the will of God. This is why social justice is needed to reclaim the moral center of our faith that has somehow drifted so far off course as to enable many of us Christians to justify dehumanizing and hating our neighbor under the guise of maintaining civic peace.” (“Strive for the Will of God” February 21, 2017 article written by Rev. Dr. Dan Deleon, Friends Congregational UCC, College Station, TX originally published on theEagle.com, February 18, 2017)

After being called by God to Listen to Jesus, we are to Listen to Jesus, to Not Be Afraid, and to be Committed to Boldly Facing Suffering and Sacrifice as we Agape Love All People and have Faith in Jesus and our Divine Parent! Amen.