

2 Kings 2:1-12

Psalm 50:1-6

2 Corinthians 4:3-6

Mark 9:2-9

LISTEN TO HIM – The Sunday Service for Wanda

By Rev. Dr. Don Algeo

The Bible is the living word of God. That means that we do not approach it for the same reasons we approach other texts. We read the Bible – and especially those portions of the Bible that tell us what Jesus said, and what His contemporaries said about Him and what He did – we read them, not in order to find out a set of facts or even to find the important moral or religious principles we should follow. We can do those things, of course. We can learn many interesting facts, and we can certainly acquire information about how we should live and the shape our lives should take. We can do all that, for sure, but that's not the main reason we read the Bible, and that's not why we call it the living word of God.

We read the Bible so that we can bring before Jesus and His Holy Spirit the true joys and the true and often sorrowful needs of our own spirits. We read and reflect on what Jesus said and did, not first and foremost to acquire information, but first and foremost to acquire the spiritual help that is available nowhere else. That's why the Bible can offer different things to different readers, depending on their need, and different things to the same people at different times.

All of us here in our church family in Gaines bring a shared and sorrowful need to God's Holy Word this morning, and that need is the loss of one of our very dear members, our lovely sister Wanda. We turn to our Bible readings today, not for understanding, but for nourishment, for the kind of nourishment that sustains us even in times of sorrow and loss and confusion; the kind of nourishment that strengthens us so that we can be strong for someone else; the kind of nourishment that goes by the name of hope.

Our gospel reading for this morning describes the event that we have come to refer to as the Transfiguration. It tells us about something very strange and very wonderful that happened to three of Our Lord's disciples. It was probably in the late afternoon, and Christ had been ministering to a great crowd of people, some of whom had come to hear Him teach, some who had come to receive His healing touch, and some who were there in a spirit of skepticism.

But there came a time during that day when Jesus singled out three of His followers and asked them to join him as he climbed a high hill that stood nearby, almost certainly because this was the only place that would afford them some privacy. The disciples were Simon Peter, and the brothers James and John.

Who knows what they were feeling when Jesus approached them and asked them to come along? We learn from elsewhere in the Gospel accounts that envy was not altogether missing from Christ's band of close followers, so perhaps the three were feeling a little pride. Perhaps they were intrigued, expecting that their leader might offer them some special bit of wisdom. Or maybe they were just grateful to get to spend some time alone with Him, to whom they had dedicated their own lives.

We'll never know details like that this side of heaven. Nor will we know what they talked about on the way, or how steep and difficult the path was, or whether they carried with them anything to have for supper. We'll never know how the weather was, or what birds were singing in the trees. But we will know, we will always know for certain the one thing that matters, the one thing we need, especially at times like this one today. We will know what happened there on that hilltop, far away from the crowd below. We will know it, because the Bible tells us so.

What we know is that these three young men were granted the grace of seeing their teacher and leader in a way they had never seen Him before. They were allowed to see him shining with a radiance which they had no earthly language to describe. They saw Him speaking with the greatest leaders of their nation, one of whom had been dead for eight hundred years and the other for fourteen hundred years. They were granted the grace of hearing God's own voice speaking from a cloud and claiming their teacher as God's own beloved son, and telling the disciples that

from now on, His son and his Son alone should provide the focus and direction for their lives: “Listen to Him.”

That is to say, they were offered a glimpse of their Lord in Glory, of their Lord and of our Lord as he would be after His resurrection and ascension, as He would be after His glorification, as he would be in heaven, then and now and forever.

They were granted the sure and certain knowledge that after this life – however long, however hard it might be – after this life there is another, the sure and certain knowledge that a life of eternity awaits them, an eternity spent in the company of loved ones who have gone before and of their precious Lord Himself.

And surely on a morning like this when we turn to Scripture for strength and consolation, surely this realization is the balm of Gilead we need to bring light into our darkness, and comfort into our souls. There came a time not long in the future for these three disciples that Jesus would no longer be physically with them. And what was true then remains true today: Jesus is no longer physically with us. But just as they were granted the gift of certainty in the life to come, so we also have the sure and certain assurance of Scripture that this earthly life of disease and inevitable loss is only a stage on the way to a never-ending life of perfect and inexhaustible and indescribable grace.

That’s why Paul was able to write as he does to the Corinthians. Let’s listen to it again, in the light of our understanding that what happened that day on the mount of transfiguration was the seal and guarantee of God’s promise to Wanda and to each and every one of us:

*But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves; we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death works in us, but life in you.*

*But having the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, “I BELIEVED, THEREFORE I SPOKE,” we also believe, therefore we also speak, knowing that He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and*

*will present us with you. For all things are for your sakes, so that the grace which is spreading to more and more people may cause the giving of thanks to abound to the glory of God.*

*Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal. (2 Cor 4:7-18)*

And so, gracious God and loving Creator, our prayer as a congregation to You this morning is a prayer of gratitude. We thank you for having given us a sure and certain knowledge of a glorious and never-ending life to come. And we thank you most particularly on this sad occasion for having allowed us all the opportunity to know and share Your love for one of your beloved children, Wanda, whom You have now called (are now calling ) home. We will dearly miss her, but because of the assurance of Your Word, we will also look forward to meeting her again, and sharing with her all the blessings of heaven, and the companionship of Jesus, Your beloved Son, in whose name we pray.