

Not Just What But Also How

The mountaintop experience that the apostles witnessed was truly amazing. Anyone who has had such an experience with the divine finds it really hard to describe to others, especially the feelings that come with such an experience. Instead of looking at comparisons between Jesus and Moses; or the differences between the first reading from Exodus and the Gospel reading; or comparing the glow associated with Jesus & Moses; or comparing the 'bookends' of the Epiphany season, namely the baptism of Jesus and the Transfiguration; or even the need of coming down from the mountain, the focus today will be not just on what was said by God but also *how* it might have been said. Then we will look at a possible reason for why Jesus did not want anyone to know about this event until after the Resurrection.

It's been said that it isn't what you say, but how you say it. For example, you can say something very sincerely, meaning every word you say; or you can say it sarcastically where you actually mean the opposite. "Yes, I want to go shopping" can be said like you actually do want to go, or it can be said as if you'd rather do anything else instead. Or how many times when we've had an argument with a sibling while we were growing up and our parents made us apologize, did we have to be told, "Now say it like you mean it!"? Depending on how something is said, determines how the listener will hear those words. Unfortunately, when we see these words as text, as written down, this sense of how the words were said is lost many times. The reader then interprets 'the how' based on many factors, such as knowing the context, knowing the person who was talking and even knowing to whom they were talking.

With this in mind, let's take a look at what God said to the apostles. Not the part about Jesus being God's Son, but what God says after that, "Listen to Him."

Many of the translations include an exclamation mark after these words. But how emphatic was that? Did God say it as a command, "LISTEN TO HIM" using all caps if this were a text message? Or, did God say it in a more comforting tone, a softer tone, trying to calm Peter down from his excitement, much like a mother would talk to her child trying to console them after a mishap? Almost in a whisper-like tone, "listen to Him." Or did God say it in a more comforting tone, a softer tone, trying to calm Peter down from his excitement, much like a mother would talk to her child trying to console them after a mishap? Almost in a whisper-like tone, "listen to Him." Or in trying to get Peter's attention, did God shout over what Peter was saying? Or was God pleading with Peter to listen to Jesus? I think that depending on how God said it goes a long way in how we hear and understand these words. This phrase is typically understood as an instruction to the apostles, to us. We should listen and understand what Jesus says and does. If we hear it more as a 'command instruction' (basically said in a loud voice), human inclination is to do what we can to ignore this command, or try to find a way around it and do things our way. However, if it was said in more of a comforting tone, then we may be more inclined to follow this advice, hearing it as something that we would want to do rather than something that we **have** to do.

Perhaps the key to understanding how God may have said it lies in the text prior to this text. Six days before the Transfiguration, Jesus had asked who they thought He was and Peter gave his great declaration that Jesus was the Son of the living God. Jesus then told the apostles for the first time about the need for His dying and the way that He would die. Peter and the others then had six days to think about the difficult times ahead for them. Considering this, maybe God was

telling Peter to listen and to trust what Jesus was telling them; that God has it all under control.

However we read these words, I believe that God said it to Peter, James and John in the kind of voice that they needed to hear at that time. Which brings the question, "How does God speak to you?" When you read the Bible, do you just look at the words, without any inflection to them? Do you try to put yourself in the story and hear the words as you would have, or as you think the people in the story heard them? If you already read the Scriptures with inflection, try changing the emphasis on the words, change the tone of how you read it. You might even try reading it out loud, if you normally don't do that. After you do this, comes the toughest part - need to actually listen. Listen for God to speak to you through the Holy Spirit. Don't be too hard on yourself if you don't get it the first time. Remember, it took the apostles many times to 'get it right' and they were actually with Jesus. It takes a lifetime of practice, but a practice that is worth it.

In turning to why Jesus would tell the apostles not to say anything until after the Resurrection, we get a clue when we look a little further back in Matthew' Gospel account. Just before Jesus asked the disciples who they thought He was, Jesus was commenting on the misunderstanding they had. The Sadducees and Pharisees asked Jesus to give them a sign from heaven that He was who He said He was. After this, they went to the other side of the lake and realized that they had forgotten to pack the food. Jesus then cautioned them to beware of the 'leaven' or bread of the Pharisees and Sadducees. The apostles thought that Jesus meant food, when in actuality, Jesus meant the teachings of the Pharisees and Sadducees and Jesus reminded the apostles of the times that He fed thousands with just a few loaves of bread and fish and the amount of leftovers that they had. Recall, too, that after

one of those feedings, the people wanted to take Jesus away to make Him their king in order that they could keep their bellies full and possibly to control access to Jesus.

By telling the apostles not to tell anyone until after the Resurrection, Jesus is saying that like with the feeding of the thousands, people would want to control Jesus and make Him into what they wanted and not allow Jesus to finish what the Father wanted Him to do. He saw that fulfilling His calling to be more important than gaining worldly power for Himself, understanding that worldly power is actually more limiting and restrictive than power given directly by God the Father. So, while it may be have been tempting to succumb to the allure of the power of the world, Jesus resisted that temptation and followed the will of God. That is all that is asked of us, that we listen to him and follow God's will.

YouTube links:

Gospel and Sermon: <https://youtu.be/nEwGpZ45h4Q>

Service: <https://youtu.be/sIHPnVomG78>