

# Mystic Congregational Church, UCC

## Mystic, Connecticut

Sermon from February 3, 2008

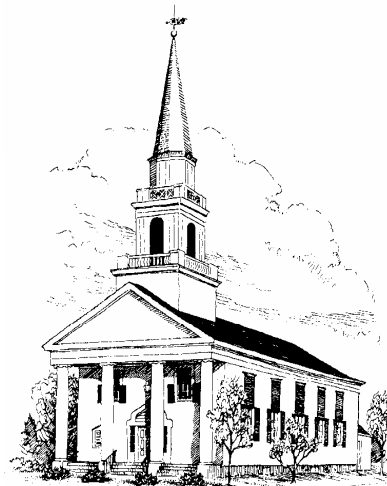
Rev. Barbara J. Libby

### “Hush Up and Listen!”

Scriptures:

Exodus 24:12-18

Matthew 17:1-9



Noah Ben Shea tells this story about Jacob the baker. One day, Jacob the baker was visited by a deputation of elders. “Look, Jacob, we’ve known you a long time. You’re not just Jacob the baker. Now everyone wants to ask you questions, and the children come to learn from you. What do you tell them?” Jacob searched his mind for a door these men might pass through and then he spoke. “I will be glad to tell you what I have been teaching the children but, first, you must all agree to put your fingers in your ears.” The men did as they were told and stood opposite Jacob, who began speaking. After a few minutes, the men waved and shouted, trying to get Jacob’s attention. “Jacob, we can’t hear what’s being said when our fingers are in our ears!” “That,” answered Jacob, “is what I have been telling your children.”

Today is *Transfiguration Sunday*. This is the last Sunday before Lent begins. The biblical story we focus in on this Sunday is the transfiguration of Jesus—a mysterious event at the top of Mount Tabor. Jesus invites his inner circle of friends—Peter, James and John—to climb a local mountain with him for some time away.

In just the preceding week, Jesus has informed his disciples that he must suffer and die but then be raised to new life. We can imagine that the disciples were still trying to figure out what that meant and that Jesus was already reflecting on the events to come and his final days as he journeyed toward Jerusalem. Jesus had fully revealed himself to the disciples, declaring that he was indeed the long awaited messiah and, yet, it seems that folks really didn’t know that meant.

As they all rest on the top of the mountain that evening, Jesus is suddenly bathed in a luminous light. The disciples watch as this bedazzled Jesus stands before them talking with two historical figures—Moses and Elijah, representatives of both the law and the prophets.

While the disciple Peter tries to figure out what to do, he is interrupted by an invitation from God in a bright cloud overhead. I would like for us to consider God’s invitation this morning to be not only for Peter, James and John but also for the members of Mystic Congregational Church. We hear the voice of God saying, “This is my own beloved son with whom I am pleased. Listen to him!”

This was not just a still, small voice. This was not a gentle *Palm Pilot* reminder. This was not a soft word of encouragement. This was not an inward intuition. This was a booming command that left the disciples flat on their faces, on the ground, overcome by fear! Let's consider that with some liberties: God's words could be translated, "Hush up – and listen!"

Preaching on this sort of text is always risky business. We move into the realm of the supernatural here or, at least, the uncommon and the mysterious. This is one of those dazzling biblical stories that often causes some to yawn and tune out, others to sigh with frustration, and still others to wonder what we are to make of such stories.

To discern the word of God in this story for our everyday lives is not easy. We might be better off if we just left this as an indescribable mystery, as God often is for many of us. This is a story about a liminal moment—when the veil between the ordinary and the holy is very thin. Yet, despite where we stand in our response to this sort of miracle story, we have an opportunity to learn something about what it is to be a disciple of Christ here today. Something unusual and extraordinary happens here.

Perhaps it is even difficult for us to heed the words that come forth from the cloud, the words that encourage us to "hush up and listen". As we prepare to enter the forty days of Lent, it is an interesting invitation—to listen to Jesus; to really listen, to listen as though we are hearing for the first time; to listen without assuming we already know; to listen with a willingness to change our minds. To "hush up and listen" to Jesus means we might have to change. Listening to Jesus might mean we learn something new about God.

It is so easy for us to miss things. If we idly chatter, like Peter, at the emergence of a miracle, we can so easily miss the moment. If we are distracted, we can miss it. Sometimes it takes the very voice of God to silence us and command our attention: "Hush up and listen!" Be witnesses with the disciples. Participate fully in this awe-filled moment. Be present in this holy occasion when God speaks!

God does not speak often in the New Testament. This is one of those rare occasions when God does speak. And because it is so rare, we do well to pay attention. "This is my son, the beloved; with him I am well pleased". Recognize those words? Do they have a familiar ring? God spoke the same words once before. They were spoken at Jesus' baptism. These are the same words. Yet this time, God adds one more thing, "This is my beloved; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"

While Peter still frantically tries to capture the moment, right in the middle of his sentence, God says, "Listen to Jesus!" "Hush up already and listen!" Here is God's gift to the confused, perplexed and befuddled disciples. Here is a gift to us as well. Sometimes, the best thing we can do is to listen!

God invites us to listen to Jesus. We may find it hard to listen when we think we already know the answers. Many of our ideas about God have been inherited from our parents, our childhood, our culture, our prejudices and our assumptions. We may need to hear God say to us, "Hush up and listen!"

When we do listen, we may be surprised to discover that something happens. A change, a transformation may take place in us. We may be changed. The biblical word is *metanoia*. It means “to change the mind.”

Paul believed that Christians were heretics that needed to be eliminated. But he changed his mind. Peter believed that Gentiles were outside the covenant of god. But he changed his mind. Martin Luther, the 16<sup>th</sup>-century reformer, believed that salvation could be earned. But he changed his mind.

I used to believe that God spoke a lot more often and with more clarity in former days. I now believe differently. I now believe in the still speaking God, the God who never ceases loving and caring for us and this earth, the God who constantly unfolds new messages of hope and salvation. I believe that this means that we worship God who is alive and active in the world, calling out for justice and truth, meeting us in facing new challenges and changes.

If, in the words of our pilgrim forebear John Robinson, “There is yet more light and truth to break forth from God’s word”, maybe we don’t yet have the whole picture! If God is still speaking, maybe there is more we need to hear. Perhaps we need to “hush up and listen.” Perhaps we need to realize that we, too, are still pilgrims, seeking and struggling and living and learning together in this community we call the church.

Because God is still speaking, we believe in God’s continuing revelation. Because God is still speaking, we can change what we’ve always done and be open to the unfolding of God’s spirit. Because God is still speaking, we can admit when we have made mistakes, and then dare to break the old rules that no longer apply. The *United Church of Christ* and its forebears have a bold record of expanding the boundaries of the church and the message of God’s extravagant love for everyone.

So let us agree to listen, really listen. Let us listen as though we are hearing for the first time. Let us listen without assuming we already know. Let us listen with a willingness to change our minds. And then, maybe, we can begin to see more clearly God’s plan for our lives and this church and our world.

As we enter into this Lenten season in the coming days, let us be prepared to be transfigured and transformed by God’s light, love and justice! Take time to “hush up and listen” to God’s voice—still speaking to each of us in these days of challenge, these days of promise, these days of expectation, these days of opportunity—for God continues to do new things among us!

Amen.

*(Acknowledgement is here made to a sermon by The Rev. Kent Siladi preached on these same texts at Redeemer Church in New Haven, CT on Transfiguration Sunday, Feb. 6, 2005)*

