

Sermon: Adventures in Missing the Point
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Scripture: 2 Cor. 3:12-4:2; Luke 9:28-43a

I don't know about you, but the news this week has me seeking some comfort. I like to think of the world as a beautiful place full of love and wonder, interesting people, adorable animals, and gorgeous cathedrals. This week, I've been reminded that the world is also a dangerous place where the abuses of power by a select few can change things for all of us in an instant. As I have many times when the world seems so hard and cold, I turned to things that brought me joy and comfort. There are many things that do this for me: the music of Aimee Mann, time with Donna and the kids, a hot cup a tea. But Thursday night, weary under the weight of serious thoughts all day, I turned to The Peanuts Gang. You know who I mean,: Charlie Brown, Snoopy, Linus, Lucy, Sally, Franklin, Shroeder... the whole crew of characters dreamed up by Charles Schulz.

There's something soothing about returning to the cast of these comics that have been with me my entire life. While Schulz's comics aren't always simple, they're always amusing and frequently, they make me think. Now, when I read anything, I generally don't stop until something profound has struck me. And when that happens, if it's the right profound thing, I need time to sit with it. This week, that profound thought tied right into what I ruminated on as I thought of the Transfiguration, which we are celebrating today.

So, let's take a look at it, shall we? To my left (below), you can see Snoopy typing at his typewriter. Now, I have to confess, as a writer, myself, Snoopy at his typewriter is one of those images that makes me smile every. single.

time. It's one of my favorite things about Peanuts. So any comic that starts this way immediately brings me some joy. Snoopy is writing a love letter in this comic, "Dear Sweetheart, I miss you morning, noon and night." Along comes Lucy, everyone's favorite know-it-all, who grabs his letter and begins reading. "That's too vague.." she says. "When you write to a girl, you have to be more specific." Hearing this advice, Snoopy resumes his letter, "I miss you at 8:15, 11:45, and 9:36..."

Now, having written a number of love letters in my time, I feel qualified to say it's fairly obvious Snoopy has heard Lucy, but not really listened to her. He's missed the point of what she was trying to say, right? Lucy wasn't meaning for him to be specific about the time, but in the sentiment he

expressed. Snoopy... doesn't get it.

How often in our own lives do we, ourselves not get it? How often do we miss the point? If we're honest, I think we can all say we've missed the point a time or two or 10... thousand. Because we're human and we can hear, but we don't



always listen to what's being said. Sometimes, we have our own ideas and no matter what's said to us, we can't really listen to it and go on doing whatever it was we were doing, missing the point of whatever advice we've

been given. I do it! I've done it right here in front of you, as Belva will remember, when I missed the point of a joke she put in one of the cards for the food bags for backpacks! I think for most of us, this has happened at least enough for us to say we've had some adventures in missing the point. Or maybe they'd be misadventures... I don't know.

In our scripture today, we get a good example of this. This story in the gospel called Luke is one that takes place in 3 of the 4 gospels, Matthew, Mark, and again here in Luke. Jesus goes up on top of a mountain with three of his disciples: Peter, James, and John. They go up there, to this quiet space, the text says, to pray. When they reach the mountaintop, however, something very dramatic happens. Jesus undergoes something of a transformation, a metamorphosis... literally, in the Greek, the word is *metamorphoomai*, which means, "to undergo a metamorphosis." Jesus is transfigured before their very eyes. His clothes become a dazzling, even blinding white and the prophets Elijah and Moses appear and converse with him. Astonished by this occurrence and completely missing the point of it, Peter offers to build them each dwellings at the top of the mountain. Now, we might fault Peter for not getting it, but Peter's suggestion isn't completely without merit. It's a natural human tendency and even a need to preserve something of those places and moments when we catch a glimpse of the mysterious Divine Presence. We build houses to God in which we come to gather and worship even though we know God cannot be contained in such small places. Peter's idea, despite its uselessness, is hardly the worst suggestion he's ever had. But before he can be rebuked by Jesus, and you KNOW Jesus was going to do that, a cloud comes over them and, we're told, they are terrified. If suddenly being enveloped in a

cloud, itself, wasn't scary enough, the voice of God booms from it, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" For once, Peter is speechless. So speechless, in fact, that he decides to stay silent, they all do, as they come down from the mountain and re-enter society the next day.

And it's not like they would have had a lot of time to talk about it anyway, because as soon as they enter town, as happens so often with Jesus, they were inundated with a great crowd of people. From the crowd, a man shouts toward Jesus, begging him to help his child, his only child, a son. Now, I'm thinking about this crowd of people and wondering how it is that this is the man Jesus homes in on? You know this crowd is loud. There are a whole lot of people trying to get Jesus's attention. But he doesn't hear all the people, he hears one man. I can remember being in crowds of kids in the hallway at school and looking for one friend or person and having a really hard time finding them. And here, Jesus is able, amidst the chaos, to pick out one individual voice. I wonder if perhaps this is the voice he hears because it reminds Jesus of God calling from the clouds about his own son? I don't know, I just thought that was an interesting parallel. Two parents, speaking on behalf of their only children.

Anyway, this boy is possessed of a spirit and the man needs Jesus's help to cast it out. That's when Jesus finds out that the man had already asked the disciples for help, "but," he says, "they could not." Now, Jesus will rebuke not just the spirit plaguing the boy, but also the disciples who, again, miss the mark—that in their faithlessness, they are unable to help the boy. Jesus then heals the child, gives him back to his dad, and we're told that "all were astounded at the greatness of God" as shown through Jesus that day.

The transfiguration story is told yearly for those of us who follow the revised common lectionary. We set aside a Sunday each year between Epiphany and Lent and we talk about this metamorphosis that Jesus undergoes on the mountaintop. I've preached this a number of times, and each time I find something new to discover, which is one of the joys of scripture. We can read these stories over and over again, and we will always learn something new... if we're paying attention.

It's common to focus on transformation on this Sunday, but I think one of the points that we often miss is the importance of the voice of God telling Peter, John, and James to "listen to" Jesus. This is my own son, says God, LISTEN TO HIM. We, like Peter, might get hung up on the wrong things. All too often, we get stuck worrying about the building, as Peter does, or debating on church doctrine. We think we have all the right ways of interpreting the gospels and the rest of scripture and we stick our noses up in the air as though we've got it right where everyone else has it wrong. Do we? Probably not perfectly. But even if we did, Jesus never told us to get all the little nuances of scriptural interpretation right. Jesus never told us to look down on those whose theology differs from ours. Whose belief system doesn't fit ours. Whose politics are different. Whose skin color or sexual orientation doesn't match ours. He didn't tell us to take it upon ourselves to tell a trans kid that they are wrong about how they identify and then to prosecute their parents for child abuse. He didn't tell us not to say gay in schools. He didn't tell us to look down our noses at those with physical or neurological differences. He didn't tell us to cast our elders aside or to dismiss those younger than we are. And he sure didn't tell us to cheer on the drumbeats of war.

What Jesus did say was to love God. Love your neighbor as yourself. Pray. Feed the hungry. Welcome the stranger. Clothe the naked. Care for the sick. Visit the prisoners. He said, "They will know are my disciples by your love." He told us to make disciples, not by telling them how to believe, but by living a life consistent with his own teachings and ministry and sharing that with the world. Now here, on this mountaintop, God lifts Jesus up, transforms him before their very eyes and says, "You've seen what my Son has said and done, listen to him and do the same thing." He's not saying, hear him and do nothing. If you're listening to Jesus, if you're really listening, you have no choice but to go out and do the very things that Jesus did.

And when they leave the mountaintop and they go down into the valley and the disciples STILL don't get it, Jesus does what Jesus has been doing, he shows his love by healing this man's child. Immediately in that moment, it says, all were astounded by the greatness of God. Not just the greatness happening up on that mountaintop, but also down in the valley below. Down in the midst of average people. Down in the midst of those who are suffering.

It took the disciples a *long* time to get it. They miss the point more often than Snoopy does. It takes a woman, Mary of Magdala, to convince them that Jesus has risen and even on seeing him, some of them still don't believe. They miss the point in part because they aren't listening, not really. They think they've already got it figured out. And as you know, when we think we're right, that's when we stop listening. How often in the church and in our own lives does this happen to us? In the church, we get so hung up on numbers of people in the pews or the amount of money we don't have to

pay the bills or who does or doesn't have the right beliefs that we completely miss the point of our entire mission, of what Jesus is calling us to do. We don't LISTEN TO HIM.

Because the point of our work is not found in the numbers or the money or the specifics of our belief. We get the point when we donate food bags to children in need at Manchester Elementary. We get the point when we fill the food pantry next door. We get the point when we donate to refugee resettlement. We get the point when we welcome newcomers into our congregation with open hearts and arms. When we tell the trans kid and his family that he is loved not just by God, but by us. When we tell the ones hurt by church in the past that no matter who you are or where you are on life's journey, you are welcome here. We get the point when we celebrate the faith formation of young people like Sadie, who will be baptized today.

Friends, my message to you today is that we've gotta listen to him. I'm going to be very blunt with you today: we can't afford to miss the point any longer. The world is broken, people are hurting not just half a world away, but right here at home. We've traveled long enough on our adventures in missing the point. We've gotta wake up and "get it" now. We can't be like Snoopy, hearing but not listening to Lucy's point as we continue to write the letter we want to write. We must decide that we're going to listen to Jesus and take these teachings to heart—resolved to *do something about it*. Just as Jesus leaves that mountain resolved in his commitment to fulfilling his mission here on earth, we must move forward resolved to live out our mission to show the world what the love of Jesus, shining through us can do. We can't just stay up on that mountain or up here in the sanctuary marveling at how much God loves us, we must follow Jesus off that

mountain, out of the sanctuary and out into the world. The world is hard and painful enough without more adventures in missing the point. This week's news has shown us that there's no time to lose. Let us listen. Let us do. Amen.