

WELCOME 7th March 2021 – 3rd Sunday in Lent '21 B

Mark 9:2-10

Welcome! It's great to be together again. Delighted you are here.

As has become our custom there are Group Study & Discussion resources in your hands. *The goal is for worship to be an all-week experience as God leads you into the fullness of His word & his work in your lives & then introduces you to someone this week who needs to hear the good news from you.* We are still doing those things we need to maintain a level of safety: Sign in. Hand sanitizer. **Masks.** I have communicated with the Health Minister's Office & part of their response was...No morning tea just yet. Offering. Communion.

As we move into this week: Experts say we live in an Attention Economy...& our "wealth/net worth" is measured in: clicks, likes, page-views, downloads, swipes followers & friends...Scarce seconds go buy w/o notifications, spam, social network requests, sponsored posts, reminders or news bulletins. Distraction is habitual. Checking your phone while waiting...is our default. Stopping mid-sentence while reacting to vibrations real or imagined is common place.

"Look at me" is the mind-set of the 21st century. These distractions push us further away from the abundance of life God desires that we receive. Distractions cause us to spectate rather than create. Live on the side-lines rather than get in the game.

But God calls us to keep our attention focused on Jesus. He calls us to listen to His voice so that no matter where we are, who we're with, or what's happening around us, we respond to Him alone as he lives through us to bless & transform our world.

We all know...Distractions may never go away, but in their midst we can offer our broken hurting community looking for "the next big thing," the transfigured transforming risen Jesus. He alone stills the disturbances of our lives, calms the clamourings of our hearts, & invites us to share his glory by fixing our attention & devotion on his life given for us. For when Jesus is all there is, where there is less distraction & more focus, all things are made new.

We'll explore & experience that together. Let's pray...then we'll get stuck into it.

PRAYER OF THE DAY:

Almighty God, as you gather us to worship you, we know that all across the globe, men & women, young & old, gather as well to be your church. Pour out your Spirit upon us all so that all who gather in your name may experience your presence, know your will, & receive the power to be what you call us to be & do what you call us to do. In Jesus' Name, Amen

Let's sing & then we'll hear God's Word...

FAITH CHAT:

1. What are the biggest distractions in your life?
2. What distracts you from fully entering into God's presence & spending time with him?

3 Lent – '21 B – ADDITION BY SUBTRACTION: LESS DISTRACTION – MORE FOCUS

Molly had her 1st car calamity when she was talking to her friend while backing out of a parking space & not looking behind her. She had her 2nd one while changing CDs & the car ahead of her stopped suddenly. Her 3rd was only a speeding fine when she “didn’t see” the school zone...or the guy w/ the radar gun

Not to pick on a former work-mate’s teenaged daughter...Leonie can tell you that on our honeymoon I walked into a parking meter in downtown San Antonio because I was pointing to a squirrel in a nearby park...I knew Australia doesn’t have those...distracted I thought I’d crushed my sternum...hard work being a good husband

Hands up if you’ve **NEVER** been distracted. That’s what I thought. We live in what 1 writer calls “the Age of Spectacle” & another “Carnival World”. Both point to the same experience...All around us & sometimes w/in us there’s a gigantic competition of bizarre/grotesque behaviour shrieking for our attention. If you’re as old as I am you remember what was called the “24-hour news cycle.” The approx time gap ^{b/i} the printing of one daily paper & the next as the next **BIG THING** pushed the last **BIG THING** off the front page. But w/ the internet & viral video emerging constantly, the next **BIG THING** may actually catch your attention for only a few minutes/seconds until there’s another next **BIG THING**. a constant piling up of NBTsweather vs weather event

Even when we’re **trying** to focus we often fail. A recent US study put a group of uni students in a 3-hour solitary study environment & they avgd 35 distractions usually trying to do the impossible...multitask. Multitasking is a lie...**NO ONE** does that well.

Which means what? Well...the writer to the Hebrews says this: *So we must listen very carefully (pay even more attention) to the truth we have heard, or we may drift away from it.* – Heb 2:1 Like a ship with a broken rudder, defective sail rigging or faulty compass...lack of full attention to Christ means we drift not only **attentionally** but more importantly **affectionally**...When our eyes/ears are on the continual viral search for the next **BIG THING** – grand excitement mind-blowing event heart-stopping spectacle – constant entertainment eventually our hearts our devotion our worship will be pulled toward that other thing...or a torrent of next **NBTs**...So we must listen very carefully (pay even more attention) to the truth we have heard...exactly what Peter, James, John were told: *“This is my dearly loved Son. Listen to him.”*

Mark writes his gospel in a very straightforward way...For Mk only 2 questions matter...remember there’s no C-mas/birth narrative. angels shepherds magi stable Bethlehem... *The beginning of the gospel (good news) of Jesus Christ (the Messiah), the Son of God.*

For Mk himself there is no debate...the center of human history...the axis of all that is has come to us from God in his one & only beloved Son Jesus...From that point It’s on us: Who do **you** say Jesus is? What are **you** going to do about that?

As Mk poses those questions, chaps 8-9-10 are critical. For 8 chaps, Mk presents every evidence of what he declared at the beginning. Jesus heals, casts out demons, raises the dead, feeds multitudes...the undeniable pronouncement that in Jesus God’s rule/reign/kingdom – setting things right is here now — until at one point the disciples themselves are absolutely terrified & ask: *“Who is this man?...Even the wind & waves obey him!”* – Mk 4:41 Who is Jesus? Even eye witnesses grapple...

In the middle of chap 8...Jesus confronts the 12 *“Who do people say I am?”* – Mk 8:27 He gets a laundry list of wrong answers. That’s no different today...ask someone you know out there & you get a ton of wrong answers...But then he takes it to them: *“But who do **you** say I am?”* – Mk 8:30 Peter is spot on *“You’re the Messiah.”* At some point...we all have to answer that question...just another spectacle – carnival – NBT? OR... in Jesus Christ God rescues & redeems all things...restores all the broken & messed up pieces & parts of our lives... establishes his presence w/in us - his protection over us - his provision for us & his power working through us. Who do you say Jesus is?

By the sheer volume of distractions in our lives, Christ grows more & more distant from our attention & from our affections. The minute we focus our lives on some spectacle – entertainment – extravaganza designed for our self-fulfilment or self-protection & take our eyes off of Christ, we lose our direction, & begin to drift off course. The whole carnival/spectacle age is all built on a lie: If you give more of your life to your distractions, spectacles viral global clamouring...you will become more satisfied – more content – more in control – more aware...And that’s a false promise. They never deliver.

Even the church...years ago a pastor whose ministry many churches modelled called what he did “entertainment evangelism.” Worship is not theater for passive viewers to come & be entertained by professional minstrels & stage performers. This is a gathering of God’s people in active communion w/ the Father & one another fully attentive & engaged by the glory of eternity in Word/Sacrament & in the lives of our brothers/sisters as we are transformed into the image of Jesus from one glory into another. (2 Cor 3:18) Can’t do this on-line...via Zoom...not the same.

Six days later Jesus took Peter, James, & John, & led them up a high mountain to be alone. As the men watched, Jesus’ appearance was transformed... For a brief instance the radiant divine glory of Jesus was revealed. Long ago God spoke many times & in many ways to our ancestors through the prophets. But now in these final days, he has spoken to

us through his Son...The Son radiates God's own glory & expresses the very character of God, & he sustains everything by the mighty power of his word. – Heb 1:1-3 And in the midst of that radiance are Moses & Elijah. The great LawGiver & the Great Prophet...The "Law" & the "Prophets"...the foundation of the relationship the Israelites enjoy w/ the Father. They pointed ahead to the day when God would make all things new & bring down every threat to his people...& Jesus stands w/ them as their fulfilment...The Father adds his voice "This is my dearly loved Son. Listen to him."

When the dust settles & the cloud clears Moses & Elijah are gone & Jesus alone is left standing on the mountain. From that moment Peter, James, John are forced to live w/ the reality that their entire spiritual history & cultural identity have collapsed into the life & mission of Jesus. They've got nothing else from now on but Jesus... There's no going back to what once was. L/P are now seen as signposts pointing to Jesus. Life for them/for all now runs through Jesus. This is my dearly loved Son. Listen to him.

Listening is not a passive take some leave some think about it some enterprise. Listening is absorbing what Jesus said/did/does & then living by it. Listening means to act on what has been absorbed. What are **you** going to do about that?

See...as much as I believe this revelation of God's glory in Jesus is about Jesus, it is also about Peter James & John...It is also about you & me, Christ's church. This is our story...because we are called by Christ's death & resurrection – called by our baptism into that new life to be those who "Listen" to Jesus & have a part to play in God's ongoing work to save, bless, & care for the world. To listen as Jesus calls us to faith – & trust his power to change lives so we too can be ones who touch & change lives – so we too can breathe out life & hope & healing as he does – so we too can make Jesus' personal love for all people a love that personally touches the people around us.

4x in these 3 chaps (8-9-10) Jesus points to his death/resurrection as the road to the fullness of his glory & the fulfilment of his mission. There is no hospice built on the mountaintop...no go somewhere private & live just you & Jesus...It is immediately back down the mountain into the struggling hurting attention-excitement-seeking carnival world of demons & unfaith – illness & death – sin & brokenness... Who do you say Jesus is? What are you going to do about that? We live our answers in every moment of every day...whether we realize it or not...every decision every relationship every encounter reveals how closely we're listening...

We know...Distractions may never go away, but in their midst & through them all God calls us to keep our attention focused on Jesus...to listen to His voice so that

no matter where we are, who we're with, or what's happening around us, we respond to Him alone as he lives through us to bless & transform our world...as we live out his transforming glory & grace and offer our broken hurting community looking for "the next big thing," the transfigured transforming risen Jesus. He alone stills the disturbances of our lives, calms the clamourings of our hearts, & invites us to share his glory by fixing our attention & devotion on his life given for us so that we & all things are made new...

Before we pray...we're going to add a new piece...If we're going to be deliberate about our discipleship...let's be deliberate...**Take it home...** What is one distraction you can get rid of this week, to help you focus on what God wants of you? 30 secs...**Go...Swap...**

Let's pray...Psalm 90:14 - **Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, so that we may rejoice & be glad all our days...through Jesus Christ...Amen.**