

Union United Methodist Church

Sermon Outline: **Spiritual Growth Part 1: Scripture, the Word**

August 14th, 2022. Pastor Michael Larbi

Readings: **Matthew 17:1-8; 2 Peter 1**

1. **"Listen to Him!", Jesus, the Word**

o **The Message of the Transfiguration**

"Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. 2There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. 3Just then **there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus.**

... a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said, **"This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"**

Matthew 17:1-3, 5 NIV

- **Moses represents the Law.** He brought us what is called the Law, the Divine moral code given to Israel as recorded in the Old Testament. In proclaiming God's requirements to Israel, he gave Israel the Shema, which is a prayer/affirmation proclaimed in synagogues to this day.

Deuteronomy 6

• שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ 4
 יְהוָה אֶחָד׃
 Hear, O Israel! יהוה is our God, יהוה alone.

• וְאַהֲבַתְּ אֵת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ 5
 בְּכָל-לִבְבְּךָ וּבְכָל-נַפְשֶׁךָ
 וּבְכָל-מְאֹדֶךָ׃
 You shall love your God יהוה with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

When asked what the greatest commandment is, Jesus said: "The first is, **Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.**'

The second is this, **'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'** There is no other commandment greater than these."
 Mark 12:29-31 NRSV

Note the phrase: "Hear, O Israel!" **SHEMA means "Hear" - similar to "Listen!"** In modern American lingo, we could say "Listen up!" Thus, the command to "Listen to him" at the transfiguration is significant.

- **Elijah represents the prophets**, who many times called Israel to repentance and demonstrated God's power to the people. At mount Carmel, he prayed:
 "Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command. 37 Answer me, Lord, answer me, so these people will know that you, Lord, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again." Then the fire of the Lord fell ...
 When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, "The Lord—he is God! The Lord—he is God!" 1 Kings 18:36-39 NIV

- **The Beginning**

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and **the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said**, 'Let there be light,' and there was light."
 Genesis 1:1-3 NIV

- What transpired here is a mystery to us in many respects
- Many have argued against this account, in the face of Darwin's theory of evolution.
- What I do not doubt is that God has the power, ability, and what it takes to have pulled this off.
- We see some evidence of God's ability in humans: we are made in God's image and have innate creative ability. And we know from experience that our words matter a lot.
- **The Bible reveals God's nature and thinking about the affairs of human beings.** Plain accounts are given of human experiences, some of which are really horrible. No attempt is made to hide the unpleasant ways of people. God's reactions to these matters are also revealed.

The things humans have made did not evolve in the manner of Darwin's evolution - they were made, as we have come to better understand the physical world we live in and discovered the mysteries that have been here all along.

○ **Jesus: The Word made flesh**

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning.

3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. 4 In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind.

5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.¹⁴
The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. John 1 NIV

○ **God's Word: The Scriptures**

"All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work."

2 Timothy 3:16-17 NRSV

- When Paul wrote this, he was referring to the Hebrew scriptures of the Old Testament.
- The New Testament was added to the Old Testament by Church fathers in the early centuries after Christ to form the Canon of Scripture.
- Jesus is not the Bible, but the scriptures contain God's words spoken and written under inspiration of the Holy Spirit and reveal God's Word to us.

○ **The Importance of words**

- Words reflect and represent who a person truly is
- God has chosen to reveal himself to us through inspired words
- As Moses reminded Israel:

"Then the Lord spoke to you out of the fire. **You heard the sound of words but saw no form; there was only a voice. He declared to you his covenant, which he charged you to observe**, that is, the ten commandments; and he wrote them on two stone tablets. And the Lord charged me at that time to teach you statutes and ordinances for you to observe in the land that you are about to cross into and occupy."

Deuteronomy 4:12-14 NRSV

- **Jesus said: "It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life."**John 6:63 NRSV

2. **Spiritual Growth: Participating in the Divine Nature (2 Peter 1)**

- God has provided a way in which we can grow in grace and the knowledge of Christ. The Word is presented to us in the scriptures. Constantly feeding on the scriptures is really important for spiritual growth.

- **Recall the purpose of Scripture**

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2 Timothy 3:16-17 NRSV

- **Divine Power for Life and Godliness, and God's Promises**

"His divine power has given us everything needed for life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.

Thus he has given us, through these things, his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of lust, and may become participants of the divine nature." 2 Peter 1:3-4 NRSV

- The promises of scripture are to help us to overcome strong desires, and escape worldly corruption, and participate in God's divine nature.

- **Feeding the human spirit - God's word as our spiritual food:**

Moses told Israel in Deuteronomy 8:3 NRSV

"He [The Lord] humbled you by letting you hunger, then by feeding you with manna, with which neither you nor your ancestors were acquainted, in order to make you understand that one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord."

Jesus quoted this in Matthew 4:4 when he was tempted.

- Joshua was instructed by the Lord:

"This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth; you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to act in accordance with all that is written in it. For then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall be successful" Joshua 1:8 NRSV