

Transfiguration Sunday**Feb. 26, 2017****Matthew 17:1-9**

“Don’t just stand there; do something!”

Have you ever heard that said? It’s a familiar, urgent command designed to spur us out of complacency and into action! The disciple Peter essentially barks-out this command in response to witnessing Jesus on the mountain being glowingly transfigured. Overwhelmed and awed by this whole event, Peter does what most of us do in such pivotal, powerful, moving moments: Capture the moment! Seize the day! “Let’s make some dwellings,” he says. “Get out the iPhone, take a picture, and preserve this moment for posterity. Let’s get to work! C’mon, guys, pull together, get the stuff we need to make a dwelling--boards, hammers, nails. You--James, John,--don’t just stand there with your mouths hanging open! Get busy! Do something!”

Busy! Busy! Do this! Do that! Got to get to work! Produce! Achieve! It’s built into the very fabric of our culture, even our religion--the Protestant work ethic and all that. Yet, it’s the source of the most common lament I hear from church folks—congregation members and ministers alike. We’re all *tired*, having bought into the myth of our identity being based upon our accomplishments; and if we don’t *accomplish* anything, then we don’t know who we *are*. Right?

If we find ourselves on an airplane or a city bus, in a waiting room or a long line at the coffee shop, we might strike-up a conversation with the stranger who is next to us. After exchanging names and maybe where we’re from, the next thing we will likely want to know is, “What do you do?” Our *doing* is who we *are*; at least this is how it seems we’ve come to look at things. So I’d suggest that Peter’s insistence on *doing* something on that mountain top is completely natural. But then God’s voice interrupts Peter’s babbling, saying, “Hush! This is my son, the

beloved! Listen to him!” Did you get that, Peter? Quit *talking* and *doing*, and, for once in your life, simply *pay attention*. Be still. Listen!”

Sure, Christ’s call to follow him does issue forth in all sorts of *doing*, but only as our *response* to his call and not as *condition* for our identity as God’s precious children. This identity comes only as gift, pure grace, free and undeserved. Yet, somehow we’ve forgotten this. Or perhaps some of us have never known, simply how to be.

People buy lots of books that they hope will tell them what to *do* in order to succeed. Above all else we want to know what we’re supposed to *do*; don’t we? But maybe we get so action-oriented that we often fail, like Peter, to be contemplative, spiritual, grounded and centered in the essential reality of God’s presence in our lives; simply to stand before, and in awe of the mystery of God so that our *doing* can be meaningful, purposeful, and sustainable.

A wonderful book on spiritual renewal by Henri Nouwen is called *Out of Solitude*. In it Nouwen writes:

[[In solitude we become aware that our *worth* is not the same as our *usefulness*. We can learn much, in this respect, from the old tree in the Tao story about a carpenter and his apprentice:

A carpenter and his apprentice were walking together through a large forest. And when they came across a tall, huge, gnarled, ancient, beautiful oak tree, the carpenter asked his apprentice: “Do you know *why* this tree is so tall, so huge, so gnarled, so old and beautiful?”

The apprentice looked at his master and said: “No.... Why?”

“Well,” the carpenter said, “because it is useless. If it had been *useful* it would have been cut-down long ago and made into tables and chairs, but because it

is useless it could grow so tall and so beautiful that you can sit in its shade and relax.”]]

Then Nouwen goes on to write:

[[In solitude we can grow old freely without being preoccupied with our *usefulness* and we can offer a *service* which we had not planned on. To the degree that we have lost our dependencies on this world, whatever our world might mean--be it father, mother, children, career, success or rewards--we can form a *community of faith* in which there is little to defend but much to share. Because, as a *community of faith*, we take the world seriously; but never too seriously. In such a community...” (as is this beloved community of our called McClure United Church) “we can adopt some of the same perspective that was that of Pope John XXIII, who was famously known for his ability to laugh at himself. Once, for example, when a highly decorated official asked him, “Holy father, how many people work in the Vatican?” Pope John paused a moment then replied, “Oh, about half of them I suppose.”]]

The trick, as in most things I suppose, is *balance*—something I haven’t been very good at myself over the years. *Balance* is knowing when to “do,” and, when and how to just “be.” Learning to take our calling and our work seriously, but not too seriously! To let go of our need to control, to listen for the voice of God, so that our actions don’t begin to resemble those of a chicken running around with its head cut off, but instead are true acts of discipleship that flow from a *being* that is forever formed in the awe and wonder of God’s gracious love for us.

Enter Peter on the mountain. He wants to get busy with his own agenda because he surely doesn’t like the agenda Jesus has just introduced – a few verses earlier – with the whole “take up your cross” thing. But the voice from God persists: “This is my son, the beloved...listen to him!” This moment of

transfiguration is intended to prepare Jesus and his disciples for that journey which lies before them; a journey into tough times and suffering, a journey to and through the cross, a moment of assurance of quiet and of solitude to prepare them for what is to come. And I believe that this same voice beckons us – you and me – followers of Jesus today as we stand on the verge of our journey into the season of Lent, called to reflect upon suffering, to carry the cross, to stay awake and to wait with Jesus – God’s beloved, who calls us his beloved. To stay awake and wait for as long as it takes.

Lent, which begins this coming Wednesday, calls us to rediscover our spirituality, to *be*, to quit our frantic babbling and pay attention, to consider who we are as *dust* apart from *whose* we are in our baptism, God’s precious children, forgiven, loved, held, and only from that identity, having been gifted, called, and sent-out to do God’s work in the world. Friends; if we don’t get the “*being*” part, then our *doing* will only be chaotic, frustrated attempts at self-justification grounded in fear and devoid of any joy. If all our *doing* seems madness and pointless, then I suppose we’ll need to learn again how to *behold the mystery*, to enter a quiet place of awe. Always, there will be great need and ample opportunity to live-out our call to discipleship, to take up the cross, to love and serve others. But in order to be able to do that, to do it lovingly and faithfully, at least for now, don’t just do something! *Sit* there! Behold a mystery! Pay attention in this season of Lent.

Amen.