

Sharenting the Transfiguration

Transfiguration Sunday, February 23, 2020

Matthew 17:1-9

Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

You're on Facebook or Instagram and you notice a friend sharing photos of her 2-year-old at the beach pouring sand over her head. Another friend has a photo of his 9-year-old son on a tractor plowing the back 40. The photos don't stop there! Social media is awash with kid pics: in the bathtub, performing magic tricks, taking a pratfall on the sidewalk, learning to ride a bicycle, spitting up on grandpa, and spitting cereal out of their nose.

There is a word for this over-sharing about our kids on social media: "sharenting," a hybrid of the words *sharing* and *parenting*. Sharenting happens any time an adult in charge of a child's well-being, such as a parent or a teacher, transmits private details about a child via digital channels. Sharenting, in the internet age, means to post or repost something on social media; and there is a growing concern that we are over-sharenting, putting too much online.

Critics note that excessive sharenting invades the privacy rights of a child. In extreme forms, sharenting can lead to "digital kidnapping," whereby children's photos and details are appropriated by others who promote the kids as being their own. Some of these innocent photographs even turn up on pornographic websites. Sometimes info is used by predators to target children once they get on the web themselves. Studies estimate that by 2030 nearly two-thirds of identity-fraud cases affecting today's children will be the result of sharenting.

Most sharenting stems from simple parental pride: we love our kids and want to share their achievements and antics with others. It's a way to keep loved ones who live far away in the family loop. But we should exercise some caution and set boundaries about what private pics and stories go public.

Today's gospel reading is a blatant case of sharenting. Jesus is having his shining moment with Moses and Elijah, when God the Father interrupts and begins bragging about his Son. "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!" God did the same thing at Jesus' baptism, using almost the same words to promote Jesus' ministry. This Transfiguration event, as with the baptism, gets "reposted" by other gospel writers!

To understand the Transfiguration, it is helpful to look at the context. Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem where he knows a horrifying fate awaits him. His mind is occupied with thoughts of his coming suffering and death. Perhaps he wonders if, in fact, the kingdom of God can truly come through an event that looks to all the world like the failure of his life and mission.

Amid those thoughts, the Transfiguration happens, and it serves as God's endorsement on the choice of Jesus and God's support for the commitment that Jesus is making. In this sense, the primary audience for Transfiguration is Jesus himself. The very voice that commissioned him at his baptism comes again to assure him (and the disciples with him) that the road ahead which leads to the cross is the right one. Clearly, God's statement about Jesus is the central focus of this incident, but it is also "sharenting" in that it is addressed to the disciples, and, by extension, to Bible readers today: "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!"

Just how do we listen to Jesus? Of course, the New Testament brings some of his words to light, but many don't listen to all of them in the sense that they let his words change their behavior. I mean really, how much of the Sermon on the Mount informs your daily actions? How often do the parables of Jesus affect your choices? When, if ever, does Jesus' command to take up your cross and follow him embolden you to risk it all for the sake of the gospel?

The world is a noisy place, filled with distractions. It can be hard to hear Jesus speaking to us. Most of us are not fortunate enough to hear God speaking loudly and clearly as Moses did, or the prophets did, or the apostle Paul did on the road to Damascus. So, just how do we hear God speaking? I think there are three primary ways: through Scripture, through one another, and by the Holy Spirit.

We hear God in Scripture. Scripture is God's Word for us. Scripture is God's thoughts written down for us to see and read and study. Scripture is a blueprint for how God intends to right the wrongs of this world and establish God's enteral kingdom. God's Word speaks to us, in our earthly circumstance, bringing comfort in times of grief, encouragement in times of doubt, inspiration in times of need, and reprimand in times of sin.

Our Christian faith teaches that in Jesus, God can be seen. In Scripture, we have Jesus' words and deeds recorded for us. His life speaks to us of compassion and discipleship, of

service and sacrifice, of obedience and grace. As the late Bible scholar William Barclay put it, “When I see Jesus feeding the hungry, comforting the sorrowing, befriending men and women with whom no one else would have anything to do, I can say: ‘This is God.’”

We hear God in one another. In the same manner, God speaks to us through one another. When I see one of you delivering meals, or pounding nails, or teaching a child, or serving a need in the community, I can say, “This is God.” What we do matters more than our words. St. Francis of Assisi is quoted as saying, “Preach always. Sometimes use words.” Our parents told us something similar: “Actions speak louder than words.” When we see one another doing some act of kindness, we take note and appreciate how it makes the world better.

We listen to Jesus when we model our lives after his. When we bring good news to the poor, and proclaim release to the captives, and offer recovery of sight to the blind, and let the oppressed go free, and proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor (Luke 4:18-19), we are listening to Jesus. But more than that, we are heeding Jesus’ call. To listen is one thing; to “heed” is to take notice and to alter our course accordingly. Knowing the right thing to do, and then doing it, is truly listening to Jesus.

We look for affirmation from the church and other Christians that what we are hearing is God or Jesus speaking. Run it by people you trust and who seek God’s will. They will tell you if you are on track or off base. Becky Hodges says that she asks Jesus for a sign of confirmation, and then proceeds down the path of what she believes Jesus is calling her to do. “If doors fly open and it’s natural, that means Jesus is in it,” she reasons. “If I have to push to make everything work and doors keep slamming in my face, I get back into my prayer position.” When we are doing the right thing, the thing to which God calls us to in Christ Jesus, those around us will affirm what we are doing.

We hear God by the Holy Spirit. The writer of Hebrews exhorts us: “Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, as on the day of testing in the wilderness” (Hebrews 3:7-8). God is always speaking. The Spirit assists us in our hearing and understanding of God Word and will for us. The Spirit also guides us as we decide right from wrong, and as we seek to act on our beliefs. It is the Holy Spirit of God which helps us to hear and heed God’s word for us.

We see the fruit of the Spirit as evidence of our rightness in hearing and heeding God. When we see love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control result from our actions, then we are truly hearing and heeding God (Galatians 5:22-23). Becky Hodges says, “If [Jesus is] speaking to me, then I should experience one or more of these things, right? So, this is what I worked out with Jesus early on: I asked him to please make me anxious if I’m not hearing his voice or if someone else told me something that isn’t from him. On the flip side, I asked that if it is his voice to please give me a feeling of peace that washes over me from head to toe. And he has faithfully done this for me, and it’s made me more confident in telling the difference between his voice and my voice.”

Our God is a Sharenting God. Fortunately, God did a lot of sharenting, a pattern that included the Incarnation, the cross, and the empty tomb. In one of these sharenting bursts, God advises us to listen to Jesus. Jesus will later say that if we are going to follow him, we will need to deny ourselves and pick up a cross. God’s instruction at the Transfiguration is to listen to Jesus’ words, because his words are the words of life, for he himself is the Word. That’s worth sharing and reposting. When we hear what God says to us in Christ by the Holy Spirit, and when we heed his call to discipleship, we can be assured that God will be sharenting what we do for all the world to see.

Prayer: You speak in unexpected places, and with unexpected voices, God. And we aren’t always sure how to listen. We aren’t always sure who to listen to. We aren’t always sure if we’re really hearing you. Be blunt with us, please. Be clear. Give us the challenge of loving you, of loving the other, of loving ourselves. And help us to live it out! Because you are God who loves us all, even when we don’t know where to turn. In Jesus’ name we ask it. Amen!

Sources:

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