



Listen to Him!

Transfiguration Sunday

Matthew 17:1

*“This is my Son, whom I love;
with him I am well pleased.*

Listen to him!”

February 26, 2017

Thoughts for the Week

Scripture: Isaiah: 49:14-15 • 1 Corinthians 4:1-5 • Matthew 6:24-34

For as many years and as far back as I can remember I have treasured Sunday afternoons. As a youngster, when the family had returned from church and enjoyed a nice dinner, a young neighbor friend and I would hike off into the woods near our house for a long and peaceful afternoon. We would take our BB guns and do some target shooting pretending the targets were often big game somewhere else in the world. Our imaginations were limitless.

Many years later, after coming home from our new church home in Plymouth, MI, we would head out to places unknown and simply cruise around. Sometimes visiting friends or relatives and sometimes just to view the wonderful outdoor lifestyle in our fair state. I imagine it's much the same with many other people: On Sunday afternoons when dinner is over and the Sunday papers are read, people will head out for an NFL football game or whatever their fancy may be.

During our younger years the temptation of seeing what is beyond the next hill or turn of the road was always with us. Life however, has a way of changing without you being aware. It sort of creeps up on you until you suddenly realize that your lifestyle has taken a completely different path than you ever imagined it would.

Now, we are leading more a sedentary lifestyle, but Sunday afternoons are still a precious and quiet time for me, devoted to relaxing, watching some TV programs or simply sharing time with close friends (usually with food in the mix somewhere).

I am recalling all these events after reading some meaningful verses in the gospel of Matthew regarding the sacred appreciation of beauty. Interestingly, Jesus also seemed to appreciate Sabbath afternoons as a time to cease preaching for the moment and simply enjoy the elegance of God's creation. *“Look at the birds of the sky.”* He would say, *“They do not sow or reap, they neither gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not more important than they?”* *“Learn a lesson from the way the wildflowers grow: They do not work, they do not spin. Yet, I assure you, not even Solomon in all his regal splendor was arrayed like one of these.”*

Sunday (Sabbath) afternoons, according to Jesus, therefore, are mostly about leisure, about rest, about recuperation, about refreshment. There is something deep in the aesthetics of our human nature that can distract us from worldly concerns if we decide to observe and appreciate them.

Having made his point about the critical worth of the person as opposed to earthly things, Jesus has a few choice words to say about the human concerns for clothing and their external beauty *“Be not concerned,”* he says. *“If God can take care of the flowers which bloom today and die tomorrow will he not take care of you, you of little faith?”*

There seems to be little doubt that clothes are an immensely important item in the economy of the world of our time. Each

Sunday the newspapers across the country devote a section to men and women's apparel. As you browse through the pages, there is a sense that the latest in fashions and the prices of clothing are an important part of people's lives. Yet, how long will this suit or dress be worn? What happens to it when the short-term interest of the individual wearer fades? The amount that people spend in clothes is almost unimaginable.

And then again, Jesus offers us a way to find a clear path of conscience through these externals: *"Stop worrying over questions like, what are we to eat, or what are we to drink, or what are we to wear? Your heavenly Father already knows all that you need. Seek out his holiness and all these things will be given you besides."*

I suspect that it would be difficult to convince the people in the fashion industry that Jesus' suggestion might have some usefulness. Of course, Jesus was not talking to the folks at the salons and runways in Paris, New York, Rome or London. He was speaking to ordinary people like us. Perhaps there is still time enough and some hope that we will take Jesus' words seriously.

Finally, Jesus is simply suggesting to us that it's time (already) for us to ask the deep questions of life: what is truly important and what can be passed over as superficial? Sunday afternoons might just be the right moment to reflect on all this.

Happy Birthday – Donna (2/27)

Our Generous Response

There are many lives waiting to hear the redeeming words of the gospel, or to be lifted from hopelessness by the hands of loving servants. But they will be lost to you without the generous response of disciples who share from their own bounty that others may know the joys of the kingdom. —Doctrine and Covenants 162:7a

God gives and loves graciously and generously! We know that all we are and all we have are gifts from God. As followers of Jesus, our whole-life commitment is in response to God's wonderful generosity. Being generous is about aligning our priorities with God's priorities, aligning our hearts with God's heart.

What is our response as disciples of Jesus? In simple terms, we are called to respond with thankfulness and share with others as generously as God has shared with us. The following six spiritual practices of A Disciple's Generous Response guide us in managing and sharing our resources:

Receive God's Gifts - God gifts each person with boundless grace and unending love. God's gifts for each of us are expressed through the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.

Respond Faithfully - When we faithfully respond to the ministry of Jesus Christ we become accountable to one another, God, and ourselves. Our response to God's gifts of love and grace is to serve others and let generosity become part of our nature.

Align Heart and Money - Managing the money we have, no matter the amount, expresses our desire to love and help God, neighbors, ourselves, and the world. When we focus our giving on God's purposes, our hearts become more aligned with God's heart.

Share Generously - Tithing is a spiritual practice. It is a gift of thanksgiving to God in response to God's generous gifts to us. When we share our tithes, the church can spread joy, hope, love, and peace around the world so others can experience God's generosity, too.

Save Wisely - Saving is a way to prepare for the future. It gives us the chance to extend our love and create a better tomorrow for our families, friends, the church's mission, and the world.

Spend Responsibly - Responsible spending is a commitment to live a healthy, happy life together with God and others. The teachings of Jesus challenge us to make lifestyle choices that are often countercultural.

When we consider the ways that each principle applies to our lives, we respond faithfully and begin to discover our true capacity for giving. The promise in Doctrine and Covenants 163:9 is clear: *"Eternal joy and peace await those who grow in grace and generosity that flows from compassionate hearts without thought of return."* We invite you to join us on this journey!