### “That Voice” Steve Finlan for The First Church, Feb. 19, 2023

**2 Peter 1:16–19**

16 For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we had been eyewitnesses of his majesty. 17For he received honor and glory from God the Father when that voice was conveyed to him by the Majestic Glory, saying, “This is my Son, my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.” 18We ourselves heard this voice come from heaven, while we were with him on the holy mountain.

19 So we have the prophetic message more fully confirmed. You will do well to be attentive to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.

**Matthew 17:1–9**

1 Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. 2And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. 3Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. 4Then Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” 5While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, “This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!” 6When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. 7But Jesus came and touched them, saying, “Get up and do not be afraid.” 8And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone.

Welcome back to First Church. As we gather together we open our hearts to God’s word as given to us from Jesus.

Both passages today require us to listen in faith, since they speak of something that is really a miracle. Instead of a healing, it’s a revelation of Jesus’ spiritual nature, with two heavenly beings appearing beside him. The apostles knew that some of the stories they would tell about Jesus would seem fantastic. We have to use our faith and reason as we hear these stories, and test the message, to see if it rings true. For all of us, miracles are amazing, but our faith is not fundamentally based in miracles but in the spiritual warmth that we feel in our hearts and the light of truth that we see in our minds.

In his Transfiguration, Jesus’ dazzling white appearance seems to be like a spiritual, and not a physical, form. And two beings appear there with him. We are told they are Moses and Elijah.

Not knowing how to respond, Peter offers to build three tents for the three dazzling figures. Then a heavenly voice speaks words that are similar to those spoken at Jesus’ baptism. And I’m going to call that miraculous: a Voice from heaven, saying “This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!” (Matt 17:5).

Of course, this frightens the disciples and they hit the dirt to show their submission. When Jesus touches them and tells them not to be afraid, they stand up, and Jesus is now alone. The other two beings are no longer there. It was a heavenly visitation, just as miraculous as a healing, I think.

2 Peter builds upon this experience, saying that he and his friends are not speaking about myths and legends, but real experiences, as when they heard “that voice . . . conveyed . . . by the Majestic Glory” (2 Pet 1:17). “We ourselves heard this voice,” the author says (v. 18). You notice I say “the author,” rather than saying Peter. That is because most scholars today don’t believe Peter wrote 2 Peter. This is because the epistle has very sophisticated Greek vocabulary, which a Galilean fisherman is unlikely to have known, and it seems to reflect some debates going on in the church around the end of the first century.

It can be called “Petrine” because it reflects some of the ideas and vocabulary found in 1 Peter. The earliest form of 1 Peter probably is from Peter himself. So 2 Peter does flow from that compositional stream, probably written by someone in one of Peter’s churches, maybe someone who knew Peter and remembered his stories.

The author finds it important to lean upon the historical validity of the events witnessed, and the voice heard, at the Transfiguration. The Voice from heaven is one of the most remarkable revelatory events in human history. The whole event was something of a mystery, too. Partly because Jesus made Peter, James, and John promise not to speak about the experience until after his resurrection (17:9).

It surely was a mystery in the apostles’ own minds. Were those two characters who appeared with Jesus really Moses and Elijah, or did Peter just assume that? Why were they there? What was Jesus accomplishing with this self-revelation? Was it just to impress them with his divinity, so they would have no reason to doubt it? Clearly this is one of the after-effects. They would never again doubt his divinity. But was that its only purpose? Doesn’t it seem that there was more going on, more that we don’t understand? I think it has to remain a miraculous mystery. And this allows *us* to ponder the deeper meanings that may be relevant to *us* in our lives.

Now, imagine you are one of the apostles who has seen this miraculous event. In your mind are a thousand questions, and yet you cannot talk to any of the other apostles about it. I wonder if Peter, James, and John yearned for time alone with Jesus to ask these questions, but that he resisted talking about the event. The Bible gives no further information and lets us ponder it for ourselves, just as the three apostles had to do.

The event eventually forms part of the faith-foundation for the author of 2 Peter. It shapes his belief system. It helps him believe in “the prophetic message more fully confirmed” (1:19). He goes on to elaborate this belief: “You will do well to be attentive to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts” (1:19). The morning star was a messianic image, originating in the Book of Numbers: “a star shall come out of Jacob” (Num 24:17). The 2 Peter passage is an exhortation to believe. It is saying the apostolic witness originates from *eyewitnesses*. We should hold on to the truth like holding on to a lamp, until the day dawns and the Messiah arises in your hearts, probably referring to an experience of certainty in one’s heart.

The miracle stories of the NT might be a bulwark of your faith, or they might not be. The *teachings* of Jesus are the most important thing, as he inspires us to seek and find, to love and forgive, to become humble and receptive like a child, to pray and not be discouraged (Matt 7:7; 19:19; 18:22; 18:3; Luke 18:1).

In short, we may have been a witness to a miracle in our lives, or have experienced some life-changing event, or will, in the future, be a receiver of a mystery. We hold on to the faith message and carry it with us daily. It is like a candle in the darkness whose warm light guides us. Trust in your faith-experience. It is a *living* faith, full of mystery and discovery.