

Seances. That is what they had in the room that I knew as my parent's bedroom. Not my parents, not while we lived there but years earlier, back in the 1920's people gathered in that room to make contact with those who had died. I am guessing they sat in a circle, had candles burning, spoke some special words and waited for a sign, a sound, a touch. It must have happened more than once for me to have heard about it decades later. But at some point the seances ended.

By the time I grew up things like seances seemed part of a more ignorant backward time. Men were going to the moon, science was changing everything. Educated people did not speak of ghosts and spirits and visions. The boundary between life and death was like an iron curtain, nothing could cross over.

And now? Many people have spoken to me about visions of one who has died, signs from beyond the grave, Last week someone told me about people who are hypnotized that tell of former lives. When I was at the monastery in Kentucky last fall, the abbot talked about places where the Virgin Mary was appearing right there in Kentucky. If all of you who are gathered here today were to tell what you think about contact from beyond the grave we would all be startled at the variety of opinions and experiences. These days it seems that iron curtain is full of holes.

Once, when Jesus was praying on top of a mountain, two whose life on earth had ended centuries before appeared to Jesus, spoke to him. Moses, whose grave was never found, and Elijah, taken up to heaven in a fiery chariot spoke with Jesus about Jesus' Exodus – that is the Greek word that is translated departure – Jesus' Exodus that he was to accomplish at Jerusalem. Clearly they were talking about Jesus death on the cross. Peter and James and John witnessed this – Jesus' face changing, his clothing glowing, Moses and Elijah appearing. They wanted to hang on to this moment, Peter suggested that three dwelling be built, but even as he was speaking a cloud came over the mountain and out of the cloud a voice proclaimed, "This is my Son, my chosen, listen to him." In that instant the cloud was no more, Moses and Elijah gone and in his everyday face and clothes Jesus was there with them alone.

Luke tells us that Peter and James and John kept silent about this in those days.

Mostly that is what people do with these things – keep silent. Oh, they may tell a spouse or a parent, a best friend, sometimes a pastor but mostly people keep silent when the boundary has been crossed. For some the experience is too precious to risk them with someone who cannot be trusted. Others wonder if they are losing it to have had such an experience. So Peter and James and John kept silent about what had happened.

After Jesus was raised from the dead, they told. That is how we have this story before us today.

Now what I would like to be able to do is to tell you what is true and what is false, what is to be believed and what is to be doubted. It would make me a lot more comfortable if I could say with certainty that this vision is true and that one false. It would make me a lot more comfortable to tell you why others have experiences I have never had. I do not know. But I do know this: three of the twelve disciples were given this vision. When the day of reckoning came all of them ran away. Peter and James and John were no more faithful than those who were not invited to come up the mountain that day. As Luke tells the story of Jesus this mountaintop experience seems to have had no effect on those three. Even God speaking to them, telling them to listen to Jesus did not change them.

What matters for us is not what we know about the life to come but that we believe and trust in Jesus in the life we are living now. Through Peter and James and John's eyes we are given this vision this morning – through their telling our ears hear God declaring that Jesus is God's Son, God's chosen one - that we should listen to Jesus. That is what will matter for us – that we listen to Jesus. For our future does not depend on what we decide about God but what God decides about us.

We are given a glimpse of God's way of deciding in what Jesus says and does when he crosses the boundary between death and life. After he is raised from the dead when Jesus comes to the disciples who failed him, his first word to them is a word of peace. "Peace be with you", he speaks, And then speaks it again, Peace be with you.

And his second word is a word of sending. Jesus teaches nothing about what it is like up in heaven. But he sends his disciples with his words and his forgiveness and his love to bring good news.

I do not always know what to think about the experiences people have but I do know what to think about sharing love and forgiving and telling of Jesus. God wants us to love and forgive and tell of Jesus. On that we can all agree. Amen.