

# Sorry, No “Pause” Button

Transfiguration Sunday

February 3, In the Year of Our LORD, 2008

Gates Presbyterian Church

The Rev. Ralph S. English, Pastor

Exodus 24:12-18 and Matthew 17:1-9

Last Sunday, I spoke of how adept Sally was with the remote control for our television – of how quick she was to mute the loud commercials that so often interrupt a show we are trying to enjoy. With Sally visiting family in Florida, I found myself on one occasion scrambling to find the remote so as to silence a particularly obnoxious commercial – and used my need to *immediately* silence the television as a starting point for what is really immediate and urgent in our lives – as in the call of Christ for us to serve as disciples who not only share the good news, that is our salvation in and through Jesus Christ, but how to also seek the ways of justice and peace in a world that needs that message – and that reality – so badly.

Don Chapin, concerned my need to find the remote control quickly enough decided to solve my problem with a gift. Here [pulling the 11 inch by 5 inch by 1 inch remote from inside the lectern] is his solution. Don’s theory is that this enormous gizmo can’t possibly get lost in the day’s newspapers! ... Given last Sunday’s reference to the “mute” button on remote controls and the cartoon in this month’s Harbinger that shows someone in the front pew of a sanctuary pointing a remote control at the preacher and pushing “fast forward,” today we complete the trifecta: there is another button on most remotes of which we need to speak today – the “pause” button.

Let’s be clear: Moses would have loved a “pause” button when he was up on the mountain with God – knowing what stiff-necked, hard-headed, sin-prone people were waiting for him down below. Had Moses known what was “going on” down there – including the pagan worship of a golden calf – he *really* would have liked a “pause” button. But there was no such opportunity in the offing. Moses’ moment to bask in the glory of our God came to an end. Moses had to come back down the mountain. He had work to do, people to cajole, commandments to share, ... there was no time for a “pause” button.

Let’s be clear: Peter, James and John *wanted* a “pause” button during the event we call the Transfiguration. They were enjoying this moment of Jesus, transfigured in dazzling white, up there on the mountain with Moses, the law-giver and Elijah, the prophet. This was a special moment to be captured, frozen in time – a “pause” button would have been ideal. In their milieu, all Peter could suggest was that the three disciples erect a tent or a shelter – anything for Jesus to use to *stay* up on the mountain, to at least *pause*. This event on the mountain came on the heels on the some disturbing words that Jesus had just shared. While there had been some glorious moments – Jesus’ baptism, the beginnings of His teachings, miraculous healings, the feedings of thousands with seemingly little food, there had been some less than glorious moments: Jesus’ rejection by His own people in Nazareth, the death of John the Baptist, and then ... then some particularly disturbing words when Jesus told His followers that when He reached Jerusalem He would undergo suffering and death.

Let's be clear: If there were an occasion to want a "pause" button it was then and there, on the mountain of the Transfiguration. Like Moses on the mountain in the presence of God's glory, this was a tremendous occasion – and who would blame Peter, James and John, having just heard what would occur in the months to come, from wanting to freeze the moment in time, capture the glory of the event, erect those tents or tabernacles for Moses, Elijah and Jesus – and just stay there.

Let's be clear: There are people who approach this table of our LORD [pointing to the center Communion Table], who comprehend in the depth of their souls the wonder and majesty and awe of the sacrifice for which it stands, experience those precious moments when past, present and future collide, when loved ones, both family and friends, are somehow, beyond explanation, here in community, communion, with us, when the gathering of disciples with their LORD in an upper room in Jerusalem coincides with our gathering here in this sanctuary this morning ... and want, not surprisingly, to freeze the moment in time, hit a "pause" button [holding up the remote and appearing to touch the "pause" key] and ... and ...

Now it is time to be *really* clear: There was no "pause" button for Moses and there was none for Peter, James and John either. There is no "pause" button in life and there is no "pause" button in ministry. That table [pointing to it again] is all about gathering in the name of Jesus the Christ – but it is also about capturing a moment *after which* much ensued. Jesus' sacrifice in the wake of that "Last Supper," reminds us of the work we have to do, that no matter what good we have accomplished on behalf of the needy of the world, no matter the degree to which we have shared the good news (if we have), no matter how we have been in Christian fellowship with each other in times of joy and times of incredible pain, there is no rest for the Christian, there is, in the words of the reflection that starts our worship bulletin, no time to rest on ones laurels [see the reflection reprinted at the bottom of this text], that, like Moses who had to come back off that mountain and return to those wonderful chosen but all too human people and Jesus, Who came down from the mountain for there was ministry to do, people to teach, miracles to perform, Pharisees and Sadducees to debate, and a journey that would lead inexorably to Jerusalem and that would unfold during Holy Week, ... as for Moses and Jesus for w(W)hom there was no "pause" button, there is no "pause" button for us either.

Oh, there might be calm, still, reflective moments as we hold the bread and the cup and are filled with the glory of God's presence and are reminded of the sacrifice of our LORD, but as in the words of the hymn we just sang about the Transfiguration, "swiftly pass the clouds of glory." The last words of the first stanza remind us that almost immediately, Jesus "fixed His eyes" down the mountain towards all that lay ahead. Just as certainly, we move from the mountain top experiences of worship and fix our eyes, our hearts and our energies to all that lies ahead, the work we still have to accomplish to preach the good news, establish ways of justice, and live our lives as beacons of hope and grace and love in a world that needs all of that so very, very much. Sorry! No "pause" button!

Amen.

[REFLECTION: "To rest on one's laurels" - *Meaning*: If we rest on our laurels, we're satisfied with what we've done and we don't try to improve or make things better. If we rest on our laurels, we feel that the success we've achieved is enough. This is most commonly used in the negative to mean that we should do more in a situation. - English1010.com]