

## Sermon: Seen and Heard

NRS 2 Peter 1:16 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. 17 For 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." 18 We 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. 20 First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, 21 because no prophecy ever came by human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

NRS Matthew 17:1 Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. 2 And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. 3 Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. 4 Then 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." 5 While 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!" 6 When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. 7 But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Get up and do not be afraid." 8 And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone. 9 As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, "Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."

Loving Creator shine as a light before me that you may be seen and not I. Give me words that I may speak, give us ears that we may hear, and through your Holy Spirit help us understand.  
Amen.

Today is Super Bowl Sunday. I am so glad that you people are here and not at home watching the pre game show. You are probably TiVo-ing it. I realize that millions of Americans are going to watch the game today. It is usually the most watched TV of the year. Advertisers spend what sound like insane amounts of money to have their time before the viewers.

I have to wonder how much is spent on this the making of these commercials. They often have better writing than TV shows.

Millions of people will tune in to see the game as it happens.

Those people will know the outcome immediately. They will be sure what happened, because they saw it for themselves.

Later tonight, on the late news the scores will be shown, a report will be given. Tomorrow morning it will continue. We will hear about the game and the results will be broadcast far and wide. The chances are that even people who did not see the game will hear about it.

Let's say that the Giants win today, like my wife Jodi is hoping. If I tell someone tomorrow that I saw the game, and tell them the Giants won. I would hope they would believe me. I saw it for myself.

Or let's say it is the Pats as I am hoping. I should be able to tell others and be believed.

Our Gospel passage today begins: six days later. So to fill in the blank a bit, the 16th chapter of Matthew is a discussion between Jesus and his disciples about him being the Messiah. Peter declares, you are the Son of God.

Chapter 17 continues this story by leading us to the climax, the mountaintop experience of knowing Jesus.

Peter and James and John were taken up the mountain top. They were probably accustomed to this kind of outing with Jesus. He prayed in the wilderness and on mountains, this was not unusual. Going off to pray with these friends might be expected.

What happens when they arrive at the mountain top was not expected. Jesus begins to glow. His clothes, his face, he glows. Who knows what this was, but the three saw this whatever it was that happened.

Then Moses and Elijah were there with Jesus. It is the two greatest heroes of the past right there chatting with Jesus. This would be like one of our presidential candidates being visited by George Washington and Abe Lincoln.

Moses and Elijah make for a strong endorsement of Jesus' authority.

Peter was deeply moved by this event, this experience was overwhelming. I am sure they were all moved, but we know that this experience stuck with Peter.

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. 17 For 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." 18 We ourselves heard this voice come from heaven, while we were with him on the holy mountain.

We have more and more people today claiming that if we can't prove that God exists, then it is delusional to believe otherwise. Believing that Jesus was more than a great human would also be delusional.

There was actually a book out called the God Delusion.

This is becoming a societal thing that we need proof. The CSI generation wants the proof. I heard this week or last that jurors are now saying that they have trouble convicting without DNA evidence.

Lawyers are concerned because cases that were proved in traditional ways with witnesses and such are suspect to people who want absolutes. Granted there have been mistakes made in the past for many reasons, but there are standards for deciding guilt and innocence. Proof, how can we prove something? Will DNA explain intent? Will it ever see more than the simple facts?

What proof do we have that God created? That Jesus died and rose from the dead? That the Holy Spirit breathes life into us?

We have Peter's testimony; he was there that day; he heard the voice saying "this is my son." We have other testimony.

The First Letter of John says it well, and, remember, John was also with Peter and James that day:

We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life--

2 this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us--

3 we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.

In almost any court of law at least two witnesses are needed; here we have two.

Without going into all that we have in terms of eyewitnesses, there are the rest of the disciples who also witnessed and we have Paul who, like others, met Jesus after the fact.

We want to be sure; we want to follow the right path.

My great grandmother came to the US from Italy at 13 years old. She was a very wise woman and she had all kinds of little things she would pull me aside and tell me some little proverb. She had all these little bits of wisdom.

She was very upset with me when I took up smoking cigarettes in my late teens. I tried to make her feel better by telling her I was cutting down. She pulled me aside and told me a

story about a woman who had a habit of drinking 5 cups of tea a day. H -A- B- I- T She cut out one cup but still had A BIT, she cut out a second cup and was still BIT. She went down to two cups but still had IT. When she got to one cup a day she still had T.

I thought she was pretty funny, but humored her.

What I found as I have lived a few more years is that she was on to something. Habits can own us, and if we hang on to even one piece of the habit , it is still there.

I needed to find these truths for myself, we need to do that, we need to check things out and try them. After I did, Great Grandma Vincenza made sense after I had also seen and heard for myself.

We have a vibrant and rich history here in Monson. First Church is a place where people have come to see for themselves, they have come to hear with their own ears.

God has been present to this community during its 245 years. We could recall countless examples of ways that God has been in the midst of First Church. I have seen the Spirit of God touching and moving and healing people here in this place. God is with us and if we take the time to watch and to listen with spiritual ears, we can know God in ever new and ever astonishing ways.

Today is our annual meeting. We come to discuss the life of this church. This church stands as a witness to our baptism into the Body of Jesus Christ. We gather at the table to be joined as one body.

That is what we are called to be is one body. First Church is one body, joined Jesus, and led by the Holy Spirit. Whatever else we are , we are that. We have many ministries, but these are not the church. We have committees, but they are not the church. The church is all of the body of this church gathered in Jesus name, that is First Church.

I have been discussing my concerns recently because we do have challenges facing us in this Post Christian time. If First Church is not the main focus of our attention, all the other ministries are at risk. If First Church stops being here, what then? What happens to Nomads, or Habitat, or our music, or our Sunday School? What happens to all that we do here in Jesus name?

Jesus says see first the Kingdom and all good things will be added unto you. Let's be sure that we remember the ways we have seen and heard God at work here in First Church. Jesus has a use for this church, a call, a mission, but we can only make that happen if we have a strong church here.

As that happens we can look and see what God is doing, and we can listen and hear our Still Speaking God.

The Patriots and the Giants will play a game today. Even people who don't watch the game will hear about it. When we tell our story of God in our lives, do people believe it

the same way? Do people want an eyewitness account of how God has been working in people's lives?

How is God working here in Monson?

I want us to think about how we can put First Church first and put the ministry of Jesus Christ first. Watching and listening for God among us, we can find the grounding that began the church and nurtured the church through 2000 years of being in hot water. If we do that, if we focus on what makes us a church, I think all our other ministries would be stronger.

If we make First Church a priority, we can leave this church even stronger for the next generation. We will also have even more stories of how we have seen and heard Jesus in our midst.

We are here for one reason, to be Christ's people.  
We are joined in one body.

Thanks be to God.  
AMEN.