

Sermon Easter 4      Easter People Listen to Jesus      by Pastor Kit Greaves April 25, 2021

Pray: Lord, give us a word from your word. Amen.

Listening is not waiting for your turn to talk; listening is a relationship to treasure.

But sometimes listening to every voice can be too much.

There's a TV ad for a quick lube company featuring a frazzled-looking woman in the family van which is getting an oil change. When the technician tells the woman that he's finished the oil change, we see inside the messy van where the woman has been leaning back, having a quick snooze. Her phone buzzes and she doesn't answer, clearly not wanting to listen to the mayhem happening at home. "Do it again," she says to the oil change guy, just to buy herself a few more moments peace.

There are many voices competing for our attention. Where do we find an authentic voice to listen to and who will listen to me, even my unspoken, painful sighs? Who sees me for who I am and understands me?

Of the 74 examples in the bible of the word 'listening', the response is either listening that leads to the way of life and love, of healing and hope, in other words listening to God or listening that leads people astray. In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve listen to God say that they may eat of the fruit of the trees, whatever they'd like, except don't eat of the fruit of the tree in the middle or they will die; the voice of the deceiver comes, they listen to it and not to God and are led astray. Consequently, humanity suffers separation from the authentic voice. Time and again God's people are given opportunities to listen to the authentic voice, even when it's hard to hear. Sometimes our surge-protector walls us off from God, like the older priest Eli who'd forgotten how to listen to God.

Young, pre-teen Samuel was confused and didn't know how to listen to the voice calling him in the night. He asks his mentor the priest Eli and finally Samuel goes back to his bedroom, hears the voice calling his name and responds as he was instructed. "Speak Lord, for your servant is listening." Samuel is able to listen to God, to hear the good word and the hard word, throughout his life and provide leadership for God's people who had not listened to God as their king and insisted on an earthly king.

Through Moses' leadership, through David and the Psalms, through the prophets and proverbs; some listened and knew life; some chose not to listen and continued in their stiff-necked, stubborn ways, yet God did not give up speaking to his people.

The bible readings this morning illustrate both kinds of listening. In Acts 3, just before this morning's reading, Peter and John hear a beggar asking for money. Peter says, "Silver and Gold I don't have, but what I do have, I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth get up and walk!" The beggar gets up, and not only walks but jumps and leaps and praises God! That's some good listening and healing going on! The religious authorities, having thought they got rid

of the menace Jesus, arrest Peter and John and ask by what name they are doing these things? But the religious rulers, the same people who had Jesus condemned, don't want to listen. They hear this amazing speech. Acts 4, "Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders, <sup>9</sup> if we are questioned today because of a good deed done to someone who was sick and are asked how this man has been healed, <sup>10</sup> let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that this man is standing before you in good health by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth,<sup>[d]</sup> whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead."

Two kinds of listening; listening that leads to life and love and healing and hope, listening that leads astray.

In the chapter of John's Gospel just before today's reading, something similar is happening. A man born blind has been healed. He is called before the religious rulers, the Pharisees, conduct an investigation, first with him, then his parents, then the former blind man, again, how it is he was healed. In Jn 9: 24 ff

So, for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, "Give glory to God! We know that this man (meaning Jesus) is a sinner." <sup>25</sup> He answered, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." <sup>26</sup> They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" <sup>27</sup> He answered them, "I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?"

It was one of the marks of the true Messiah, that he would heal someone born blind. Yet they refused to listen. In Isaiah 35:5-6, the prophet speaks of the day of salvation this way: "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy. For waters break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert."

In Matthew 11, John the Baptist has just been imprisoned. In his perplexity—if the Messiah has come, how could this be?—John sends his disciples to ask Jesus if he really is the Coming One. Jesus responds: "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is the one who is not offended by me" (Matthew 11:4-60).

When Jesus is saying in John 10, that he has other sheep that he will call, he is referring to non-Jews, Gentiles like us who will be invited to listen to his voice, as he leads like a good shepherd, unlike the bad shepherds, the religious leaders who throw out the man born blind that Jesus healed; they do not listen to God; they notice Peter and John are ordinary, unlearned men but that they have been with Jesus! Makes all the difference. A good shepherd leads those who listen, beside still waters, who restores our soul. We are HIS treasure.

Jesus is good shepherd, the true Messiah, Saviour, the Christ, Emmanuel, God with us. But the leaders don't get it, they don't listen.

Do we get it? Jesus is the one to listen to. But the listening begin with him. God listens to us. You see, listening is not waiting for your turn to talk; listening is a relationship to treasure.

God gives us his word and God is always listening, better than Siri or Alexa or Google.

Jesus listens, not for profit or algo-rhythmic buying patterns, but for your healing and mine.

Time with Jesus is time when you lose yourself, lose track of time, lose so much of what's been weighing you down, you come out feeling lighter, looser, freer. Listening prayer is not for super saints. I like the way Tony Campolo puts it in his book *Following Jesus without embarrassing God*. Whether we call it listening to God or prayer. Anyone can do it.

Campolo quotes Soren Kierkegaard who once said that reading the Bible is like coming to a street corner and waiting for traffic to pass before crosswalk signal. And while you wait, you overhear the conversation of two women in front of you. They are oblivious to your presence, but as they walk, you realize that the conversation is about you. And what they say reveals to you things you never suspected about yourself. (pg 70) When I read the bible in the power of the Holy Spirit, it's just like that. Though it was written to me, I sense that it was written for me. I don't just hear what the bible says to people in places long ago and far away; Rather, I feel as though I am overhearing messages that were meant for me. In my devotional reading of scripture as distinct from my times of study, I feel my soul being opened up to glimpses of Truth that are incredibly personal.

VIDEO?

Prayer is not something we can understand. It's not magic we control and it follows no known logic. Not everyone we pray for gets healed. But when you start to pray more and more coincidences happen and people are getting healed. You cannot systematically predict how it will work. Jesus said, the wind blows where it wills and you hear the sound of it but you don't know where it comes from or where it's going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit (John 3:8). Our prayers are immature. And yet there is divine listening going on.

Have you ever fallen asleep while praying? Jesus was pained by the awareness of how ill-equipped and doomed to failure his dear friends were, because they had fallen asleep three times when he asked them to pray on the most trying night of his life. They had not taken the time to become yielded in stillness to the empowering that comes to those who wait patiently for the Lord.

Once Mother Teresa was asked, "When you pray, what do you say to God?" She answered, "I don't say anything; I listen!"

Intrigued, the inquirer asked, "When you pray, what does God say to you?"

Mother Teresa's answer was, "He doesn't say anything. He listens!"

It is in such listening that we hear the still small voice that, paradoxically, says nothing. But the stillness is such times of prayer moves more powerfully than an earthquake, a hurricane, or a raging forest fire. The mind and heart must train themselves, no different than following your doctor's prescription or your coach's lessons, and retire to a quiet place where in solitude, God can penetrate our personhood.

I'm amazed at my granddaughter Charlotte who is nearly 10 months old, how she turns her head when her mom speaks or calls her name, or how she will listen for and recognize her mother's voice when she's in another room. Maybe there's an innocence we need to return to when praying, when listening to God, to a word, to our own breathing. Every week on our website Christ Church Oshawa.ca there are resources posted, Grace Enough on Tuesdays, Centring Prayer each Wednesday. They're there, free, if we'd take a moment to listen. App for your phone, a bible reading guide, one phrase from the Lord's Prayer and camp there.

Henri Nouwen said toward the end of his life that prayer had become for him primarily a time of "listening for the blessing." The real work of prayer, he said, is to become silent and listen to the voice that says good things about me." That may sound self-indulgent, he admitted, but not if it meant seeing himself as the Beloved, a temple in which God chose to dwell. The more he listened to that voice, the less likely he was to judge his worth by how others responded to him, or by how much he achieved. He prayed for that inner presence to express itself in his daily life, in such things as eating and drinking, talking and loving, playing and working. He sought true freedom in an identity that was anchored in a place, "beyond all human praise and blame."

Listening is not waiting for your turn to talk. Listening is a relationship to treasure.

When it comes to Maker of the Universe, the one who died on our behalf to bring forgiveness, healing and hope, time spent listening to Jesus is time well treasured. Easter People listen to Jesus. When I feel listened to, by my spiritual director, by my wife or other friends, my dog, there is healing. As it turns out, we cannot measure how God heals.

Listen to the lyrics. Listen again after church maybe when you steal away in your car to get away from the noise and listen. God hear and have mercy.

We cannot measure how you heal  
or answer every sufferer's prayer,  
yet we believe your grace responds  
where faith and doubt unite to care.  
Your hands, though bloodied on the cross,  
survive to hold and heal and warn,  
to carry all through death to life  
and cradle children yet unborn.  
Thanks be to God.