

Listen Up!

King of Glory Lutheran
Pastor Ruth Ann Loughry

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Year A: Pentecost 7: Mt 13:1-9, 18-23

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. ²Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. ³And he told them many things in parables, saying: "Listen! A sower went out to sow. ⁴And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. ⁵Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. ⁶But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. ⁷Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. ⁸Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. ⁹Let anyone with ears listen!"

¹⁸"Hear then the parable of the sower. ¹⁹When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path. ²⁰As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; ²¹yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away. ²²As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing. ²³But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty."

Let anyone with ears, listen. Jesus is asking us to hear God's Word, really hear it. Listening is an active engagement and a discipline of a disciple. At times God's Word hits us differently; we are like the rocky or hard soil. God's Word remains supreme.

Ok, you all now, listen up! (coach with team)

Now you listen up! (mad parent)

Come on you guys. Just listen, please? (pleading)

Listen! (excited)

I'll bet you're listening now, aren't you? Jesus said, "Let anyone with ears listen."

Will you pray with me?

Holy God, in this very moment we pause before you. We hear you in the song of the birds and feel you in the coolness of the shade, the warmth of the sun. Humbly we ask you to open our hearts and minds that we might hear what you have to speak to us.

Amen.

As I spoke those four statements about listen up, I'm guessing you had a particular reaction. Perhaps you were drawn to one more than another. Or you imagined in your mind a particular person speaking.

"Ok, you all now, listen up!" Maybe a coach.

"Now listen up!" An irritated parent.

My point is the words aren't only words; the words do something in and of themselves. When a coach asks players to listen, the players get encouraged to hang in there, or excited to enact whatever next play the coach says is in order. When an irritated parent says, 'listen up', the child feels disciplined or disappointed and that they will need to change their behavior.

Jesus says, "Let anyone with ears listen." As if...as if, the parable, the story of the seeds and the soils is about more than simply seeds and soil. As if, the story imparts the words, but there is something else going on which Jesus wants them to feel or understand.

We think that the first section of the parable is original to Jesus. An incredibly generous sower is throwing seeds in all sorts of places that wouldn't grow a seed if its life depended on it. Seed was expensive in Jesus' day. No frugal farmer would throw seed in all the places Jesus describes. Perhaps that's why a carpenter is telling the story and not a farmer!

We think the second half of the parable, the portion about various kinds of soil, was added by Matthew's contemporaries who were in essence telling people to hang on to their faith even in tough times.

Here's the reality. Seed doesn't just remain a seed. A seed, when planted, becomes something else. With sun and rain, seeds become fruits or vegetables or gorgeous flowers.

God's Word isn't just God's Word. God's Word, the Bible, produces a response in us. It isn't only the Words themselves, but our response to what the Bible has printed. To say it another way, what the Word of God does is just as important as what it says.

In the beginning, when God created the universe, God spoke and whatever God spoke of, that very thing came into being. 'God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light...God said, "Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place and let the dry land appear." And it was so.' (Gen 1:3, 9) The actual words of God are powerful! They call into being things that are not. God's Word creates, it heals, it disciplines. What the Word of God does is just as important as what it says.

Isaiah 55:11 “so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.” This word equals life! It is faith and repentance and salvation!

In Romans chapter 10, Paul is asking, ‘how will people believe if they’ve never heard the Good News of Christ?’ He says this, “Faith comes from hearing and hearing from the Word of Christ.” (Romans 10:17) In other words, the words of scripture actually create faith in the one who hears them.

Indeed, God’s Word is living and active. Martin Luther said this of the Holy Bible. “The Bible is alive, it speaks to me; it has feet, it runs after me; it has hands, it lays hold of me... A simple layman armed with Scripture is to be believed above a pope or a cardinal without it.” (Quoted in “Martin Luther--The Early Years,” Christian History, no. 34.)

What do you think of that? Any of you with a Bible and it’s very words has more influence than a professional church leader with no Bible. God’s Word can move mountains. It creates faith. We all know that words have power. Just take a look at an advertisement or performer. Listen to a judge say, “You will serve five years in prison.” Yet, God’s Word has more power than any words we will ever say.

Now at various times in our lives, the Bible has various influence upon us. We’ve all been through seasons we are like the hard soil or rocky soil. I’m guessing you can think of times when you hear a lesson at church and it makes no more sense than a monkey tap dancing on a piano. Maybe that’s because the preacher didn’t explain it well – shame on us. Or there’s the day when you think, “My neighbor really needs to hear this sermon!” Nothing particularly wrong, it just didn’t move you.

Likewise, I’ll bet there have been other times when upon hearing God’s words, they’ve been as comforting as a baby sleeping in your arms. You go to a funeral and hear Psalm 23. Those words just wrap themselves around you like a blanket. “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.” That’s when our hearts are like good soil. We recognize it because the lesson matches what we need in our spirits.

It’s not only the Words, but what the Holy Spirit does with those words in our spirits. The Lord is my shepherd. The Lord is my shepherd. The Lord is my shepherd. The Lord – and none other - is my shepherd.

Let anyone with ears, listen. What Jesus is calling us to is active, deep listening. If you’ve taken any classes on communication or leadership or even marriage classes, the instructor has talked about active listening. This kind of listening doesn’t let us off the hook for simply nodding our heads and murmuring a ‘yeah’ or ‘no’ once in awhile. Active listening purposes that we take a real interest in what someone else is saying so

we can paraphrase them or ask a clarifying question. These skills make our conversation partner know they've been heard.

Jesus is calling us to active listening as we ponder the Bible. We can do this whenever we encounter scripture. Prior to worship we can offer a quick prayer asking the Lord to reveal what we need to hear. We can pray before reading the verses for our daily devotions. "Lord, I'm listening. What do you want me to know?"

Because the challenge in our modern times is this. There are so many words! The variety of words that call out for our attention can be mind-boggling! TV, media, social media, politicians, newspapers, bloggers, authors, musicians, comedians...the list goes on and on and on.

Jesus calls us to pay attention to what words we listen to. None of them have more power than God. Yet when what is on tv or the internet article has more draw or pull on our lives than words of scripture; that's a moment to pause. Let anyone with ears, listen.

And of course there is grace. As we continue to grow as a disciple of Jesus, we keep standing under God's Word. We won't always understand it, but we listen actively. When we fail, we hear the word of absolution: a word of forgiveness which quickens our hearts, builds faith and restores hope.

Each Friday at 1 pm, over Zoom, a group of us practice sitting with scripture. With the help of the Holy Spirit we try to actively listen for what God might be speaking to us through a prayer practice called, Lectio Divina. You are invited to join any week. I also put the steps of Lectio on papers near the office.

Because just as God's Word does something, our response to scripture is critically important. The passage might move us to pray. Or work on forgiveness, or write a letter to a senator, or love more deeply. As God's spoken Word created something in the beginning of time, so now we listen to what it creates inside of us. What is our response? What are we being called to do?

Let anyone with ears, listen! Will you say it with me?

Let anyone with ears, listen!

Let anyone with ears, listen!

Amen.