

Listening to God February 23, 2020

What does it mean, to be a good listener? Do people ever remark on what a good listener you are? Think of someone you know, whom you would describe as a good listener? What are the elements required to listen well?

When they were on the mount of transfiguration, God said to Peter, James, John, Moses, and Elijah, “This is my son, the Beloved, listen to him!” “Listen to him!”

Listening is about not just hearing. It is about paying attention to the speaker, considering their words, reflecting upon what they have to say. Moses told the children of God to ‘love the Lord your God, listen to his voice, hold fast to him.’ ‘Listen to His voice’. Jesus said his followers were like sheep and he was like the shepherd. He said that sheep listen to the voice of the shepherd....they follow him because they know his voice. Do we know His voice.

Throughout the Old Testament, God communicated to humans through words and signs, but they could not see God. Then God did an amazing thing. He became a human being so that people could see for themselves what he was like. John reminds us that 'in the beginning was the Word, and then the word became flesh and blood and dwelt among them'. God the Father became Jesus the Son. Humans could see Him and interact with him and have a relationship with him!

Read the four gospels of the New Testament. Notice how God wants to be in a relationship with us. Don't you wish that sometimes God would communicate to us through some dramatic event - a burning bush, a pillar of fire, or a talking donkey?

In fact, it is really much better than all of that - God is speaking to us constantly through the Holy Spirit who lives within us. Our job is to learn how to listen, how to discern the whispers of the Spirit amidst the noise in our lives.

It is important to have a look at how Jesus interacted with people throughout the Gospels. The Spirit of God wants to be in a relationship with us. Usually soft, gentle, warm, accepting, directing.....a relationship of compassion.

Consider some of the glimpses we get of that throughout the Bible - God moments - God called Jonah to minister for him to the people of Nineveh. God never gave up on Jonah. The woman came to the well, to get water, not to meet Jesus, but it changed her life. Mary sat at his feet and listened. Martha was too busy doing....getting lunch ready. A stranger called to some fishermen and asked them to lay down their nets and follow him. For some strange reason - they did! God moments.

Before He left the earth, Jesus is very clear with his disciples. He told them he was going away, but that he would never abandon them, He would send a Counsellor, an Advocate, who would guide them

throughout their lives. Jesus was telling his people that even in his physical absence, he would be with them in Spirit.

Jesus speaks to each of us at various times in different ways. My circumstances are not those of Moses. What you are dealing with is not the same as Jonah, or the woman at the well, Mary and Martha, or the fishermen. But we can learn something about the nature and purpose of Jesus through those conversations he had with others. God is just as present with you and me and speaks to us as clearly as He spoke with them.

The woman at the well did not understand what Jesus was saying right away. He had to be slow and gentle, using questions, theology, and an image. It is not much different than when God tries to speak with us.

We are busy, we are tired, and often distracted. We have a lot going on in our lives, and sometimes we don't hear God whispering to us.

Listening to God in our lives can bring endless surprises! Look at the surprises that are part of his interaction with the Samaritan woman - a

Jew, speaking with a Samaritan, a man talking with a woman, the promise of water that will quench a person's thirst forever. God is longing to speak to you. Are you listening?.

As we grow in this listening relationship with God, we often learn that we need to let go of some preconceived ideas. It might even mean that we need to embrace mystery, and to be ok with mystery.

In the story of the Samaritan woman, we are reminded that God is with us every day and even in the most routine activities of our day.

Washing the dishes, shovelling the snow, doing the laundry, fixing the car.....what can prevent a family member or a neighbour speaking to us at those times? What can prevent God? The question is really not, "Can God speak to us"?, the question is, 'are we listening'?

Sometimes our heads are so full of our own thoughts – about all we have to do, or people we need to call, or errands we need to run, that we don't even hear what those standing right in front of us are saying.

We so easily get pre-occupied with our own busy-ness and

responsibilities. So imagine how difficult it can be to hear someone who isn't standing right there in front of us! Remember what Jesus said to the waves on the rough seas....."Be quiet! Be still". The Psalmist writes, "Be still and know that I am God".

We have spoken before about Spiritual Pathways. Some people feel close to God when they are out in nature, others when they are with another person, some take the intellectual pathway, others worship. There are others who feel that being an activist for social justice helps them to feel closer to God. Still others prefer quiet contemplation, for others it is service and ministry to others. These are ways that we innately feel close to God. It is easier for us to feel the movement of the spirit, to hear God gently speak to us, when we are in a specific context. But the truth is, that if we listen, really listen, we can hear God in all sorts of places under all sorts of circumstances, and often times, not even when we are trying. Often, the nudge, the whisper, the touch simply comes upon us, and we recognize, that it is the voice of God.

Not unlike the disciples, when we struggle with disappointment, we often do not recognize the hand of God in our lives or hear His voice.

The stranger they met on the road to Emmaus did not even seem to know about the tragic events of the last three days.

We cannot open our own eyes and ears to see and to hear God. Only God can do that. But we can put ourselves in places and relationships where the Spirit is likely to be at work in us.

On this final Sunday before Lent, I encourage you to consider your relationship with Jesus Christ. Consider your relationship with God and with the Holy Spirit. How well do you know them? How well do you want to know them? Are you looking? Are you listening?

Amen