

## “Kingdom Living: Listening”

Luke 10: 1-12, 16

We continue with our Lenten series, Kingdom Living: Centering our lives on God and Serving Others by taking a look at how listening helps us as people of faith discover the Kingdom of God in our midst.

We assume that we are good listeners but if we are truly honest with ourselves, we know that we all have the habit of tuning out certain words when they come up in conversations because we don't have the energy for the arguments that may arise if we respond or we tune out certain tones because we have heard them so much that now they are simply background noise in our everyday lives. And yes, we have to admit that we even have the habit of tuning out certain people because we can only listen to them talk for so long. We all assume that we are good listeners but if we are truly honest with ourselves, we will admit that true listening skills are a lost art in our day and time.

And why should we be surprised? Each and every day, we are bombarded with so much noise. We wake up every morning to the glaring beeping of our alarm clocks. We turn on our TVs for background noise while we are getting ready for the day. We have our radios turned up in our cars as we go to work. Even in our offices, the place where sometimes we can shut our doors just to have some peace

and quiet, we are still surrounded by noise: the hum of the computer, the ringing of the cell phone, the constant binging of email to let us know that we have received a new message that desperately needs our attention. Silence is no longer an option in our world. There is so much background noise overloading our senses each and every day that we have had to tune out certain things just for the sake of our sanity.

Which is not a bad thing until we come to realization that some of the things that we have tuned out in our lives are the conversations with our loved ones, the conversations with our neighbors, and the other conversations that connect us with and to one another. As a society, in general, we are no longer listening to what each other has to say and are creating an even bigger void in our community, an even bigger division in the relationships with the people we encounter each and every day.

So where do we go from here? How do we reclaim Kingdom Living through listening?

We do this by following the example set by Jesus when he was here on earth, preaching, teaching, healing and sharing. We have to remember and realize that whenever Jesus encountered someone along his journey, he was fully engaged and present in the moment with that other person. He looked at this person's face when he talked to him or her. He paid attention to what the person was saying. He

asked questions of that person to show his interest in that person and his or her story.

Jesus, when talking with someone, when listening to someone, understood that person's needs because he truly listened to them. He listened to that person's story and got to know that person beyond just the surface he or she presented to the world. Anytime, Jesus encountered another person, he responded to them as a child of God: important, valued, and precious in his sight. Anytime, Jesus encountered another person, he truly listened to their needs. He listened to their stories. He was fully present in that moment, connected with the other person. He wasn't thinking about the list of things that he had to do that day. He wasn't thinking that this person was a distraction and was keeping him away from something else that was much more important. He wasn't thinking of the twenty other things he would rather do or should be doing instead of listening to this person share. He wasn't thinking that he was the Son of God and had better things to do than listen and be present for that person.

Even when Jesus was in the temple teaching and the groups who wanted to argue with him over the finer points of the law came up to him, he was present in that moment. Jesus listened to their arguments even if he didn't agree with them. Even in those moments when the other side was trying to trap him or get him to say something that they could hold against him, Jesus wasn't trying to think of

what he was going to say next instead of listening to them. He wasn't trying to get the last word in just for the sake of having the last word. He wasn't disregarding what they had to say just because he didn't agree with them or because he knew it was a trap. Jesus treated them with respect and truly listened to them.

Every person Jesus encountered in his ministry was treated as important, valued and precious in his sight. Jesus made time to listen to them and saw them as made in the image of God, deserving of his time, deserving of his full attention, deserving of his respect. He was fully present in that moment each and every time.

All throughout Jesus' ministry, Jesus showed us how to be present in the moment. He showed us how to truly connect with one another through listening just like he did for his disciples in our text today. When Jesus sends out his disciples, he tells them to find one house to stay in and don't move from house to house. He tells them to eat what is set before them. He tells them to proclaim the Kingdom of God for people who need to hear the good news.

Jesus knew that if the disciples stayed in one house, then the disciples would have to engage the people who lived there. They would have to be fully present in that person's home as a guest. They would learn the people's stories, not just what the disciples assumed about the people's background. They would experience the people's lives, not just how the disciples assumed that they lived. Jesus knew that

the disciples would have to cultivate the skill of truly listening to others as they learned to live in such close quarters with strangers and friends.

Jesus sent out the disciples because he knew that for the most part that the world was not hard of hearing. The world was hard of listening. Most of the world heard things just fine because hearing only involves sound entering the ears. Hearing doesn't require anything from the hearer. Hearing doesn't ask anything of the hearer. Hearing doesn't need a connection between others to happen.

Listening on the other hand does require a response from the listener. Listening involves feelings and thoughts. Listening involves points of view and memories. Listening involves beliefs and expectation. Listening involves a relationship between the two people.

That's why Jesus tells his disciples that not everyone is going to be able to listen to their message. Some people just don't want to listen. They can hear just fine but they don't want to listen because it requires too much of them. They don't want to break down their walls. They don't want to be vulnerable to another person. They don't want to be in relationships with others so they move through this world hearing things but not really listening. That's why he tells the disciples that it is not really them the world is rejecting. It is Jesus.

Jesus knows that Kingdom of God demands something of us. It invites us to be vulnerable. It invites us to share our most personal being with one another. The

Kingdom of God calls us to be in true relationship with one another. And for some, that call is too much.

That's why Jesus says if they listen to you, they listen to me. If they reject you, they reject me. The Kingdom of God cultivates a connection through community, through listening, through relationships. And for some, that's just asking too much.

So what does this all mean for us as modern disciples of Christ, who are ready to listen to the call, who find ourselves in a world that is hard of listening, who are trying to live out the principles of the Kingdom of God in our lives?

It means that we are called to cultivate an atmosphere of listening in our daily lives. It means that we need to create opportunities for silence in our lives, opportunities where we can listen for God's word for us, listen for God's guidance for us, listen to one another without trying to get the last word in just because we can.

It means that we are called to be fully present in the moment when we engage people in our everyday lives. It means that we are to treat each other with respect even when we don't agree with everything that the other person is saying. It means that we are to treat each other as children of God, valued, important, deserving of our time, deserving of our full attention.

It means realizing that God gave us two ears and one mouth, perhaps as a way of God telling us that we should listen at least twice as much as we talk.

The good news is that When we silence the noises of this world that drown out so much, we realize that we are able to experience the Kingdom of God in our midst just by listening to the beauty of God's creation that surrounds us, by listening to each other's stories, just by listening to God's word that fills our lives each and every day. The good news is that The Kingdom of God is in our midst. All we have to do is open our ears and listen.

May we always strive for Kingdom Living, centering our lives on God and serving one another by truly listening to each other, valued, respected and precious in our sight. Amen.