

Scripture Readings:

Isaiah 55:1-3, 10-12

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

**Listening to the Word**

What comes to mind when I say “The Word of God?” .....

The “Word of God” is an elusive and complicated topic, isn’t it? What do you picture when I say the phrase “The Word of God”? Do you envision A big, dusty Bible on a shelf in the family room that you never read? Or perhaps you bring to mind A worn and tattered-paged confirmation Bible on your bedside table that you read every night? Perhaps “The Word of God” is found in the lessons that are printed in the bulletin every week that are then tossed in the recycling?

I don’t know what you imagine, but I know what first came to my mind was not nearly as alive and dynamic as what I believe it to be. Now, Don’t be afraid. I am not about to preach a sermon on the doctrine of the Word of God. Although some might have been getting excited about this, I suspect that would be incredibly boring for the majority. And God forgive us when we make the Word of God boring.

And so although I speculate that when we hear the phrase, the majority of us imagine The Word of God is just *words, I want to talk about that*. Because I believe there are some very important results when “The word of God is heard” When the “Word of God” is heard it becomes an experience. After all, the Word of God did become flesh and dwell among us. Those who met Jesus in his ministry did not just think, “Wow, he’s got some good stuff to say.” No, somehow the words and the encounter were inseparable. The words could not be understood without the particular experience in which they were heard.

Listen says Isaiah, Listen says Jesus - Listen is found 5 times in our two short passages alone. The Word of God is an experience and listening is the key to that experience.

“Remember, the Bible was written to be heard... Sometimes we forget that the Bible was first and foremost an oral experience until translations started showing up in earnest in the 15th century. No one got a copy of Galatians in the church newsletter. When Paul’s messenger, perhaps the scribe that dictated Paul’s thoughts, arrived at the church in Galatia, there was a full church meeting, maybe even with a potluck to get more people to come. Knowing Paul, I’m quite certain this was not his only correspondence with the Galatians.

But this particular letter included in the New Testament somehow stood out and said something important about believing in Jesus that reached beyond the Galatian church. It was not a

systematic treatise on justification by faith. It was a real letter to a real church with something really critical at stake.”<sup>1</sup>

Karoline Lewis makes a wonderful point about Paul’s letters. “No one gets to ponder Paul’s words in the privacy of their home. No one is afforded the opportunity to say, “Interesting, Paul. I’ll have to think about that and get back to you.” They have to deal with it then and now and together and then answer the questions, “What did you hear?” and “Now what?”

Imagine that. Did you ever think about how these letters were read to the early church? Picture yourself being in the ‘congregation’ where one of those letters was read to you- reminding people to live in love and solidarity, reminding folks to stop bickering and get along, reminding folks that they are people of God and Spirit. Asking them if they have chosen not to listen and move with the spirit of Christ to do the miracles and dreams God has called them to. Paul is not gentle about it, he is adamant that they are to be living in the Spirit, and they are failing to do so. Imagine “The Word of God” calling to you like that - asking you to listen in such a way that you are transformed as individuals and community.

I wonder if we might attempt to hear “the word of God” that way. As if it was being spoken for the first time. As if you truly believed the speaker had great wisdom, and you knew your life would be altered if you took it in. So let’s try it. Let’s hear the scripture again. (close your eyes, put down your bulletins and - Let anyone with ears listen:

“Listen! A sower went out to sow. <sup>4</sup>And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. <sup>5</sup>Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. <sup>6</sup>But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. <sup>7</sup>Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. <sup>8</sup>Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. <sup>9</sup>Let anyone with ears listen!”

What did you hear? Where are you in this parable? When and how have you felt all of these responses to God’s Word? And why? And what do you experience in this listening today?

Matthew 13:9, “Let anyone with ears listen.” The verb “to listen” is in present tense. To hear God’s Word is not a one-time occurrence but an ongoing characteristic of discipleship. Listening is essential to discipleship.

And yet, hearing God’s word has had different effects on us at different times. And so I wonder what are you hearing today? Folks of Squamish United have been dreaming and visioning since Pentecost. We have kites and Windvanes up reminding us that the spirit is moving in and through us, not just one Sunday of the year but always. You will see the kite bows and I want to encourage folks (even those from St. Johns) to listen to the Spirit - where is it moving you and

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<sup>1</sup> Lewis, Karoline <http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=3282>

us. We are heading into a season of big change and we dare not go it alone, we dare not forget that it is the Holy in whom we live and move and have our being. And yet we also remember Jesus prayed that we would be one with God in such a way that we would do even greater works than he. We heard from the prophet today that God's love and mercy will be accomplished and we have the opportunity to engage and participate with the mission of the Holy. So please continue to write your dreams and visions and post them on the kite strings. What are the seeds being planted, what shall we harvest?

God is calling us to listen and respond. It's like anything in life we can choose to just listen or we can listen, respond, act and transform. Our humble coach on the dragon boat reminds us regularly "Just listening is not enough, you must apply" Just like in life on the boat we hear the same instructions over and over and over again and yet we still pull with just our arm and not our body, we still sit us straight and don't bend to get full power, we still pull as if we are on a Sunday after noon canoe trip at Alice Lake rather than trying to propel a twenty person boat to the finish line the fastest. Until we listen and apply the words are just words that do not enter us.

In life we know what will bring us good health and strength, we can read all we want, we can listen all we want but if we do not do it is useless. So it is with faith.

The Word of God is not just words, it is to be a dynamic experience. Throughout our lives the word of the kingdom will sound different to us, and at times we may engage it in a way that the birds of the air easily pluck it away, or thorns choke out its healing, but there is the possibility that at times the yield is a harvest of 100 or 60 or even 30 fold - and in that case the world will be transformed.

And that is the great Holy promise - in those grace-filled times when everything seems to come together, when what you have heard from and about God, what your life tells you, what your community affirms, then the fruit you bear is indeed as unique as your hearing (Matt 13:23). It's not about how much fruit is produced. It's about the way in which God's Word has taken hold in you. This is not a competition about who hears God's Word better. It's about what the hearing creates in you.

May the hearing of God's word create abundant life in you and for this world.

Amen.