

He Who Has Ears, Let Him Hear

Deuteronomy 6:1-9: These are the commands, decrees and laws the LORD your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the LORD your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life. Hear, Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the LORD, the God of your ancestors, promised you. Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

Luke 24:13-35: Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognizing him. He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?" "They stood still, their faces downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?" "What things?" he asked. "About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus." He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther. But they urged him strongly, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. They asked each other "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked

with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?" They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together and saying, "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon." Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.

MESSAGE:

Last week we talked about the relationship between seeing and believing, and how the Apostle Thomas came to believe in Jesus after he was able to see--and touch--Jesus after he had risen from the dead. But immediately after Thomas professed his faith in Jesus, calling him "my Lord and my God," Jesus said that those who believed in him without seeing him were blessed. Jesus was referring to those whose belief in Jesus rested upon faith rather than the evidence of their senses. This conforms to the biblical doctrine that we are saved by grace through faith alone, and not by anything we see or do. God has given us eyes to observe and understand the kingdom of this world, but he has given us faith to look into the Kingdom of Heaven.

But how do we receive this faith? If it doesn't come from what we see or do, how do we acquire it?

The Bible answers that question very clearly: Paul writes, "Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the Word of Christ." And he adds, "...how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? "And so, Jesus said, "he who has ears, let him hear." Hear what? The Gospel--The Good News that we have a Savior who is Jesus Christ whose death on the cross atoned for all our sins and whose resurrection from the dead opened the door to eternal life to all who believe. We are forgiven and have eternal life through faith, and faith comes from hearing the Word of God.

This relationship between faith and hearing began in the Garden of Eden. The Hebrew word for "hear" is "shema." But originally "shema" didn't mean only "to hear": it also meant "to obey." Before sin came into the world, to hear God was to obey God. God said to Adam, "on the day you eat of it you will surely die," and Adam obeyed. But then he and Eve listened to another voice, a different voice that whispered into their ears, "you will not surely die." And that voice displaced God's voice in their ears and they obeyed it and nothing has been the same since.

This is why the rabbis teach that the most important verse in the Torah--the verse that defines Israel's monotheistic faith--is Deuteronomy 6:4: "shema Israel Yahweh Elohim!" "Hear O Israel: the Lord our God! The Lord is one." What we hear determines what we believe, and what we believe determines what we do. So it is of vital importance that we not allow other voices to deafen us to the voice of God.

Our gospel lesson for today is a story about two men who had done just that: they had come to believe what the world was telling them rather than the Word of God. Their story begins on the day Jesus rose from the dead. They had started out on a journey on a road

that led from Jerusalem to a small village by the name of Emmaus. Christ was not with them; you might say they were alone with each other.

Their conversation was all about the big news of the day—which, as far as they were concerned was very bad news indeed: that Jesus, in whom they had placed their hopes for the redemption of Israel, had been crucified, pronounced dead, and buried. They had had high hopes for him and were devastated by the news that he had failed to live up to their expectations.

Then Jesus joined their company and began to walk along with them, but they didn't recognize him.

Doesn't sound a lot like us? Every morning we set out on our daily walk through this world, conversing with other people about the news of the day—which is normally bad news. Bitter words spoken in Washington, violence in the Mideast, another hurricane threatening the gulf coast, mobs rioting in our cities. We shake our heads and go on our way and say, "whatever it is, it is." Jesus would love to join us—to find a place in our thoughts and conversations--but we're focused on the bad news and there's no place for the good news Jesus brings. He's always there--seeking us out, walking along with us, but we're too absorbed in worldly affairs to notice him.

In this case, however, Jesus just barges in and asks them: "what are you discussing together as you walk along?" Sometimes Jesus doesn't wait to be invited into our conversations; sometimes he opens the door without knocking. So they ask him, "Haven't you heard the news? Don't you know what's been going on?" "Who are you that you don't know what has just happened in Jerusalem?" If they only knew!

Then they tell him why they are so downcast. What they say goes something like this: "The one we called our Lord has failed us. We had hopes—oh we had high hopes—that he would save us and all Israel. He seemed so powerful. But we were wrong. The religious and secular rulers were more powerful than he was. They prevailed and now he's dead—dead for three days in fact. He can't help us. So we'll have to get our help from someone else somewhere else. How many times in our lives have we reached the conclusion that the Lord is not going to help us? That we're on our own? How many times have we asked "how could God allow this to happen? How many times have we said: "God, where are you?" The answer, I fear, is too many. Far too many.

Then one of the two men thinks to add: "oh yes--some women went to his tomb and claim that his body wasn't where it should have been. They even claim that some angels told them that he was still alive, but when his friends when to the tomb it was empty and they couldn't find him anywhere. The bottom line is, he's gone and that's that.

Jesus cuts through their ignorance, their self-pity and their despair with four sharp words: "how foolish you are!" Then he tells them what their real problem is.

Their real problem is that they have chosen to believe what the world has told them rather than what God has promised. He says, "How slow of heart you are to believe all that the

prophets have spoken!” The word of promise had always been there for them to hear, but they didn’t hear it because they weren’t listening to God’s word! They were listening to something else. They were listening to what the world was telling them. And what was the world was telling them? That they were foolish to place their confidence in what God had promised and they’d be better off seeking help somewhere else. Somewhere like Emmaus.

And how about us? Who do we listen to most of the time? God? Or the world?

What is your radio tuned to every day? What do you watch on television? On your smart phones? What do you hear from each other at breakfast and lunch and dinner? I work out at a gym and almost every single person I see working out there wears ear buds and checks his smart phone between exercises. Sometimes they spend more time on their smart phones than they do exercising. Are they afraid of silence? Of their own thoughts?

I doubt that they are listening to the Word of God. More likely they are listening to what the world is telling them, which is an invitation to place their hopes in what the world has to offer. And what the world has to offer is a garden of earthly delights. But all the promises of the world are based on the same lie the serpent whispered in Eve’s ear: “you’re not gonna die!”

Jesus has a different message and he pulls no punches in delivering it to the two men. “How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” “and beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the scriptures concerning himself.”

What a Bible lesson that must have been! Jesus explaining the Old Testament to a class of two! He used the scriptures to explain to them that if they really wanted to know him and walk with him, they needed to listen to him. As God said to Peter and James and John on transfiguration mountain: “this is my Son whom I love: “listen to him!”

Each and every one of us is traveling down our own road to Emmaus and we can listen to each other or we can listen to Jesus. If we listen to Jesus, we will hear a very different message from the one the world whispers and sings and shouts into our ears. It won’t be a promise of earthly delights--it will be the message of taking up your cross and following Jesus.

We have to travel down the road he has laid out—the road that leads to the cross. Death has to come before resurrection! And that is NOT a message we will hear from the world. Nor is it one we rejoice to hear, which is one reason we avoid listening to it. But our cross is so much easier than his! Our cross is not to die in agony, but to listen to His word and practice Christian love.

We weren’t saved from our sins so that we could spend our lives at Cedar Point; we were saved so that we could love others as Jesus loved us. That’s why the cross Jesus wants us to take up is easy and its burden is light. Maybe they got the point. Maybe we do.

The end of their journey was near, night was falling. Their hearts had been turned toward him and they begged him to remain with them. And of course he agreed to stay with them because Jesus always abides with those who ask him to.

Then, later that evening, when they were eating dinner together, he gave them the greatest gift of all. “When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. They asked each other, ‘Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?’” Think about what is going on here. The Lord takes bread, gives thanks, breaks it and gives it to his disciples. And as soon as he served them at table by speaking the same Eucharistic words he used at his last supper with his disciples three nights before—their eyes were opened and they recognized their Lord and Savior. Then he disappeared and at that same exact moment, His words came alive in their hearts! The Scriptures were opened up to them—they recalled how His words made their hearts burn within them as they listened to Him on the road. Word and Sacrament came together to open their eyes and change their hearts. And it all began with listening to Jesus.

How much plainer could God make it? Jesus wants to abide with us, and he does! He wants to come to us through our ears and through our mouths so that He can live in our minds and our bodies. It’s as if he were saying, “From now on, this is where you can find me! This is my body coming to you every time you come to my table. And if you sup with me, I will sup with you and make my words burn in your hearts. Walk with me and listen to me and I will walk with you.” So what did they do? They immediately got up and returned to Jerusalem!

There they found their brothers and sisters in Christ and told them the Good News! “It’s true! He’s alive! Contrast their reaction with Peter’s reaction to the empty tomb: “...he went away, wondering to himself what had happened.”

Two nobodies—Cleopas and someone whose name is not even written down—see what Peter fails to see! He’s alive! We have seen him! And he has shown us where we can always find Him: in His word and in the breaking of the bread! Jesus wants to abide with us in Word and Sacrament. He is always near us—in our ear, in our mouth, in our heart, in our bodies, in our minds and in our souls.

But first of all we have to listen to Him! He who has ears, let him hear! Amen.