

Sermon: Really listening

Many of those of you who know me, know I wake up at about 4 am. There are more of us in the world that you might expect and you know who you are. A recent study showed that 1 in 300 of us are early to bed, early to rise.

There are many things I love about the early morning and last summer I discovered another reason why I love my early morning rising time.

One morning while it was still dark, I had taken my cup of coffee outside to the back yard and sat in the dark, just enjoying the peace. Then, just before dawn, the most wonderful thing happened.

One bird, by itself, began signing. It was loud and clear and beautiful. At that moment it was the only sound in the world. She sang alone for about 30 seconds then there was what sounded like dozens of other birds joining. It was like magic.

Now I heard birds singing all day long in the yard but this was different. It was as if the first bird was extending an invitation to all the other birds to join the new day. It was like the hymn, "Morning has Broken like the first morning, black bird has spoken like the first day."

Since then I will sit outside just before dawn to hear this joyous greeting of the new day. It is such a gift. A gift I am aware must have been there my whole life but I was not able to hear it because I was not listening.

And now I wonder what else I am not hearing because I am not listening. And that is what I want to reflect on today.

Last week Jamie spoke about the epistle of Jude who condemned self-satisfied Christians who felt that they were so saved that they were superior to others. Not only that, they did nothing to help others because they did not need to for salvation.

Jude called these Christians the waterless clouds, the fruitless trees, the wild waves, the darkened stars. They had the form but no substance. Jamie challenged us to reflect throughout last week on the ways we are like them. Calling ourselves Christians, but not walking the talk.

Now I believe that we want to be good Christians, active in the world in following the way of Jesus but that there are things that block us.

And one of those things, I believe, is what we each in our lives have learned about the world and other people. As one of my college professors used to say, the map is not the territory. Just because we have put something on our map of the world in our heads, doesn't mean it is really there. Let me explain.

Each of us has a map, actually a set of maps, in our heads about what the world is and how it works. And we are all right in some ways but often, oh so wrong in many others.

When we are born we are thrust into a world that we have to learn how to survive in. If we are fortunate enough to be born to good parents we will learn that when we cry we will be heard and be fed or changed or comforted. As we begin to grow we learn how to move around safely, what we can or cannot touch or eat or safely do. We start building maps, or programs in today's terms, so that we don't have to constantly think about all we are doing each moment. We can eat without concentrating on

getting a spoonful of squash in our mouths rather than our ears. We learn that strange dogs can bite us. We learn how to walk a couple blocks and find our way home. Sometimes we learn these things from others and we believe them and just make that part of our map. I know someone who never ate broccoli until they were an adult because the mother thought it was a disgusting vegetable.

Other times, and I am sure that some of the parents here can agree immediately if they have had a child like this, we have to learn the hard way. For instance, I told our son, Evan not to touch the stove because it could burn him and he never did. Our daughter, Victoria, had to test everything herself and ended up with blisters all over her fingers.

Some of what we learn is helpful and right. But some of what we learn may not be so helpful or true. But it is engrained in us and unless challenged, we will act from those beliefs our whole lives without thinking.

Some of us have been taught that other religions are inherently bad, that people who are not like us cannot be trusted, that certain people are always dangerous. And we have never tested to see if that map is right.

Now, one of the things I love about the Bible is that as you reread it over the different times in your life, it speaks to you in different ways and we learn new things. We can always return to the gospels and draw new understandings of the teaching of Jesus.

Jesus said that we need to become like little children to enter the kingdom of heaven. He said in Matthew 18:3 "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."

I been thinking a lot about that line lately and to me it means that we have go back to start over creating a map of the world that truly reflects what Jesus is telling us and asking us to do. We need to rid ourselves of the map that the world wants us to have and create a new one.

To do that we need to listen to him, truly listen to him through the words of the gospels. We need to be as children sitting at the feet of the master, feeling the love of the father and the presence of the grace giving holy spirit to truly adopt a Christian life. We will need to give up what we think we know to listen to what we need to know.

Jesus came to the poor and broken and sinful and needy. In the beatitudes he told us that they will inherit the earth. Not the teachers of the law, the Pharisees, or the leaders of the nation. In the gospel today he said, "because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children." Jesus came to the common people who had pain and need and an open heart to listen and hear his words. Who were humble and therefore knew they needed to learn and to love. It was with these people he built his church.

So what does this say to us today?

Jesus also came to us. But we must be able to listen and hear him.

We **are** in danger of becoming the Christians Jamie spoke about last week. We live in a great, prosperous nation. It is easy to feel superior to others and not care about anyone else.

Unless we humbly listen to the words of Jesus in the gospels and let go of the maps we carry about the world that say we are better than anyone else, that we have a right to our prosperity because we are more worthy people, that we do not need to reach out to others because they do not deserve it, unless we can do that we will be doomed to be the waterless clouds, the fruitless trees, the wild waves, the darkened stars. And we would deserve to be. We would have the label, Christian, but not the heart of one. We would have the label Christian but not the soul of one.

We need to be like little children and constantly learn what Jesus want from us in the world to fulfill his calling to each of us to the Christian life. He calls to each of us in today's gospel "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Our burden is light, not because it is easy to be a Christian but because God will always be with us when we work at being one. Not because we will never suffer, we will. Not because we will be better than others but because we will be their brothers and sisters. Not because we will earn heaven through our own superior skills and being but through the redeeming mercy of God.

In this time of turbulence and trial, in a world polarized and spewing hateful words and deed towards others. In this time of each side taking joy in the misfortune of the other. We need to stop, listen and hear the word of God and engrave it on our hearts. Then we need to practice it in our lives, every day. We need to be the children of God. We need to hear the joyous song of the birds at dawn, bringing in a new day of peace and understanding through Christian love.

May it be so.