

## **Spiritual Practice**

*Listening/hearing 1/10/21*

Today's spiritual practice is like many a spiritual practice - its aim is to invite us into an awareness of the presence of God.

To remind us that God seeks after us, reaches out to us and that **God speaks to us.**

In just a few minutes Pastor Steve will walk us through a parable, and so I'll leave the parable itself alone - but as is the case with many of Jesus' teachings he says these particular words at the beginning and end of today's story:

**"Let anyone with ears to hear - listen!"**

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You see, the roots of our relationship with God.... the ways by which we understand ourselves .... and the roots of our social and civic engagement....

**begin with listening to God.**

The ear is our physical symbol of listening - the way by which information is taken in by spoken word - but as we see throughout scripture our hearts are the real planting ground for all hearing - where the Spirit of God speaks.

Day to day we are bombarded with competing voices and messages. As evident by events this past week - we encounter voices and actions that are full of violence, hatred, and yelling- that are loud and take up space.... We encounter relentless voices that give us non-stop "breaking news", and also voices that are good and helpful information - about our health, the weather - what's on tap for the day, and conversations with family and friends and neighbors and co-workers that add their layers of perspectives and opinions and voices - and of course - our own thoughts and voice that are added to the deck.

**There are so many voices.**

Voices that tug and pull us - in different directions.

Voices that are powerful - whether new to our ears - or old, old voices that still rise up from our memory.

Voices that fail us.

Voices that try their best to guide us, and nurture us.

**There are a lot of voices that speak to us.**

**It is hard to find the one voice that speaks from within us. The voice of God.**

AND yet - we are in this particular time - and in this particular place - with God.. and I think it would behoove us to listen to what God might be saying to us..

**Today I'd love to give us a simple practice to help us listen - uncover and orient to the voice of God.**

### **First**

#### **Review**

Why don't you take just a minute now to think about the voices that you listened to this week?

*With no judgement or critique of yourself - it's just life! - just think about the voices you've heard and listened to...*

**Pay attention now - to how you feel as you make your way through the memory of these voices...**

What's your body's response to these voices?

Stay attuned to what you are feeling... because....

### **Second**

#### **Bodies**

**In these times when so much speaks** - we need to listen to our bodies as well...

Reviewing your day or your week - allows you the chance to filter out the voices around you - and start to orient to the voice of God.

**You may realize that your body has been enraged, heightened state, rattled, tired, or numb. This helps you start to tune into the frequency of God's voice - that you need ... Whether you realize you need God's voice to speak tenderness,**

comfort, assurance... or whether you need God's voice to speak concrete guidance into what you need to say next, do next or go next...

Our bodies signal our need to still and quiet and listen to the voice of God.

### **Third Openness**

As you can take stock of the voices that you are listening to, and how your body responds to them... You can start to open your ear... your heart to God.

Because perhaps Jesus' words, **“Let anyone with ears to hear - listen!”**  
**Is more about being open to God, being open to God's presence and voice - - as it is to translate or interpret with words, exactly what God's spoken...**

Here's how you can open yourself - to listen to God:  
(as much a way to start or end your day - as it is at any point in your day - before a meeting, or phone call, or conversation - or while your brushing your teeth.. whenever))

WE'll use the phrase, that Samuel spoke in the Old Testament to anchor this practice,  
**"Speak Lord for your servant is listening"**

**Close your eyes, find a comfortable posture..**

**Orient your heart - as best you can to God w/ openness and anticipation...**

Dip your ear to one shoulder (in a symbolic gesture of listening), and take a breath:

Inhale: "speak Lord"

Exhale: "your servant is listening"

Dip your ear to the other shoulder and take a breath.

Inhale: "speak Lord"

Exhale: "your servant is listening"

Put your hands over your heart and take a deep breath.

Repeat the whole phrase: "Speak Lord for your servant is listening"

Few more quiet breaths.

**And again - it's a practice ...**

You'll find with time - some familiarity.. recognition

**Hearing is with our senses... so You might get an impression.**

**Maybe some actual words, A feeling.**

**An idea that comes to mind.**

**Whatever it might be - it seems worth the practice to listen and orient to God's voice as much as we can.**

Because listening is also not a passive skill - or a method to have us shrink back into silence - it is the first and foremost way by which we find deep movement - and powerful speech.

I'll leave you with the words of this historian, Lewis Baldwin who did a study on the listening life of Dr. Martin Luther King.. where in it he argues that the prayer life - this inner life of listening - was the "Secret (nonviolent) weapon" of the civil rights movement. Dr. King took "days of silence" and throughout the movement, there were "calls to prayer", "prayer meetings, prayer pilgrimages, prayer vigils, prayer rallies, prayer marches, prayer circles, services of prayer and thanksgiving. Prayers in church seats and on the streets. Dr. King didn't delegate prayer as a second-class citizen in the struggle for justice and equality. It was as vital to the success of the movement as picket lines, sit-ins, freedom rides, and marches.

As Dr. Luke Powery says, "perhaps we need an ear-centered theology that recognizes listening as much as speaking."

**"Speak Lord, your servants are listening."**

**"Speak Lord, we are humbly listening for your voice."**