

IS ANYONE LISTENING? Mark 9:30-37; James 3:16-4:3

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"If anyone wishes to rank first, he must remain the last one of All and the servant of all" Mark 9:35

For Jesus, the secret of his life was in his compassionate joyful, and unconditional giving of himself to the will of God. At every moment in his life, in every experience, he gave himself in full obedience to the will of God.

When he was 12 in the temple, he was surprized that his parents did not understand this: "WHY did you search for me...did you not know I had to be in my Father's house?" L2;49 From then on you can trace his commitment like a golden thread thru the gospels. This total commitment to God was the secret of his power and his influence. In the gospel lesson today, his fidelity to God's will is coming to a climax. Jesus said to the disciples: "The son of man is going to be delivered into the hands of singul men who will put him to death; three days after his death he will rise". Mark tells us that the dis-ciples did not understand. Earlier Mark has told us that the disciples not only couldn't understand why Jesus would have to be execuated, they didn't want to believe it would happen. When Peter began to protest this kind of talk, Jesus reprimandd him in strong terms: "Get out of my sight, you satan. You are not judging by God's standards but by ~~the~~ man's" In todays lesson Jesus gets more specific. He tells the disciples that according to God's standards "Anyone who wishes to rank first, he must remain the last of all and the servant of all".

It was God's will that his love for mankind be revealed to the ultimate degree in and thru Jesus. In obedience to God's will Jesus emptied himself totally, served himself up to us on the cross, gave his life for us, willingly. Jesus on the cross is God saying to us: "Now do you believe. Now can you see how much I love you".

Those who have identified with Christ has been taught and hve experienced many expressions of God love. One of the very special kinds is a listening love. A litening love is not the kind of love that says "How can I use you? How can I use you to make me happy. How can I use you to give me pleasure. It is rather the love which asks "How can I give myself in order tha your might be fulfilled?"

We talk too much, many of us. Talk, talk, talk. But even when we are not talking, we are not listening. We are too busy trying to think of waht we will say when the other persons slows up enough for us to break in. What a contrast this is to our Lord. Who, in all of history, had more right to speak with authority. Yet, how often we find himlistening.

Listning is the way we get to know another person, We cannot know how to love others until we know them as they truly are, in their strengths and weaknesses, their joys and their sorrows. But unless we listen we will never get to know them.

A husband and wife, marriedfor over 20 years, were on the verge of diyorce. They tealked with their pastor. Later the pastor described the meeting

I call in a professional marriage counselor. We were in a last ditch attempt to discover if there was anything to be salvaged from this marriage. As we talked, we realized that this man and woman who had lived together for so many years did not know each other. They hadn't been communicating with each other. They hadn't been listening down thru the years. (3)

That happens frequently. In addition the universal cry from young persons has been for parents and the older generation to "listen" more. And parents, of course, are forever asking "Why don't our children listen to us anymore?"

In the church, in families, in our places of work, how much listening is going on? In the great social upheavals of our time, who is listening to who? Is there any real communication going on between the people of nations whose capacity to destroy has grown to unthinkable proportions?

One of the games people play is to cover up their true selves with masks. They put on a plastic front so others won't know what they are really like, what they are really thinking and feeling/ This failure at communication can go for years - even a life time. Then, suddenly, it is too late. A person can be all torn up inside without anyone ever knowing it because of the mask that says they are at peace when they really are not

There is a story of some American soldiers in Lorea who had rented a house and hired a local young man to do the cookin and other household chores. The soldiers were impressed with the Korean lad's easy going, positive attitude. Nothing wver phased him, or so it seemed. Because he was always smiling, the

soldiers began to take advantage of his good nature. They ⁴ played all sorts of tricks and practical jokes on him. They nailed his shoes to the floor. But the boy kept smiling, pulled out the nails, slipped on his shoes and went *gayly* about his work. They balanced a bucket of water over the door and when the boy came in he was drenched. But he smilingly dried himself off and did not complain. Finally the soldiers began to feel ashamed. They called the boy in and said to him "We want you to know that we are so impressed with your pleasant attitude that we will never trick you again". The boy said, "You mean no more nails in the shoes?" "no more" they said. "You mean, no more buckets of water over the door" No more' they said. "Okay then", said the young man, "No more spit in your soup".

If we are not listening, we may discover some day that the one person we were sure was at peace with us had been all the while spitting in our soup.

Scientists tell us that a hearing impaired person who suddenly regains his hearing is likely to find exposure to the world of sound a frightening experience at first. During the adjustment period it is not uncommon for the cured person to seek to return to the world of silence. It takes time and conditioning to learn how to interpret sounds, how to distinguish between which threaten and those which do not...in other words, it takes time to learn how to listen. Most of us are born with

the ability to hear, but the ability to listen is an art that we must develop ourselves. 5

In the gospel Lesson Jesus says to the disciples: "If anyone wishes to rank first, he must remain the last of all and the servant of all".

Is anyone listening...to Jesus. In this fiercely competitive, dog-eat-dog society, is anyone listening. Our ears may be wide open to God's world, but unless our hearts are open to receive the message, we are not really listening...we are spiritually deaf.

Is anyone listening...are you listening...to Jesus?

To listen to God's word. really listen, we must turn to him in complete openness, love, and trust. In the words of one spiritual writer, we must turn to God "as a flower turns toward the sun to absorb creative energy. Then we simply let his creative loving presence flood us and nourish us, as the sun nourishes a newly plowed field pregnant with waiting seeds, OR AS two lovers who know each other beyond the need of words rest in each other's enveloping presence" Only in this attitude of reverential listening "can we come face to face with our own deepest and most authentic self, the self at the root of all our words and actions".

When we turn our hearts toward God "as a flower turns toward the sun to absorb its creative energy" we are spiritually nourished and energized. We not only become listeners but, by the

grace of God, we also become doers of the word. If we are not doing, then we can be sure that we are not listening. (6)

On the Mt of transfiguration, Jesus face "became as dazzling as the sun, his clothes radiant as light" and suddenly "Out of the cloud came a voice which said 'this is my beloved son on whom my favor rests. Listen to him'" (Mat 17:2,5)

Listen to him Make whatever adjustment in your life that may be necessary for you to allow the voice of forgiveness and compassion and love to penetrate your soul. LISTEN TO HIM Resist all temptation to return to the old sounds of vengeance, and the eye for an eye hate, LISTEN TO HIM. Resist all temptation to acquire wealth at the expense of honesty and decency in your relationships. LISTEN TO HIM — and you will discover that the more you listen the closer you will be getting to him and to one another. LISTEN TO HIM so that you might discover what it meant to him to be the "last one of all and the servant of all".