

## Sermon Proper 14 Year C

[RCL] Isaiah 1:1, 10-20; Psalm 50:1-8, 23-24; Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16; Luke 12:32-40

### Listen to Love

There once was a wise communications professor who had her students engage in an observation exercise. She handed out a picture of an elderly man sitting on some front steps. A young woman stood to his right, looking down toward him, and a child stood in front, facing both of them.

The professor asked the students to tell her what they thought was happening in the picture. “The child and woman are caring for the old man,” one person suggested. Another said, “The child is listening to a story while the mother watches.” “Maybe they are just passing the time waiting for someone to come out of the building,” was another guess. All sorts of stories came up until the professor finally pointed out what was really going on.

“The elderly man and the young woman are listening to the child telling them something. All the signs are there: the way the young woman is fondly looking down toward not just the old man, but specifically at the child. The man is watching the child intently. Notice the child’s hands? They are spread out away from the body and the body is leaning toward the two adults, like the child is emphasizing something and there’s a big smile on their face.” She concluded, “Communication is happening all the time, we just have to pay attention to the signs. We must be watchful and alert like Sherlock Holmes, noticing things that in normal life we gloss over.”

The Christian life is similar as we cultivate the Kingdom of God. We are both communicating our faith in our actions (showing where our treasure is) and also watching for where God is (waiting for the master to return from the banquet). We must ask ourselves whether or not we are being intentional about either. Like the professor in the story said, we are communicating all the time. The question is, “What are we saying as a Christian people?” Whether or not we think anybody is listening, God hears us, and

that is the most important measure of all.

In our reading from the prophet Isaiah today, the prophet conveys God's message to Judah and Jerusalem—a call to repentance. God has been watching the messages they have been sending through their patterns of living: giving lip service through their prayers, sacrifices that are not really sacrificial, festivals that hold little meaning to the heart. God sees a people who are glossing over the work of the soul. The effects have clearly been detrimental to the society. They commit acts of evil. They do not seek after justice. The most marginalized in Israelite society—orphans and widows—are abandoned.

How little have we learned? In our modern society, we can hear God crying out through the oppressed, through the orphans whose parents have been killed by the evil of gun violence, through the refugee widows of wars in foreign lands, and through the sacred places that have been violated by another's judgment. The signs are all there and God is calling out to us, "Look! Watch! Be ready to do your part!" Are we willing? Are we obedient? Do we have the depth of faith, as a Franciscan blessing charges us, to be foolish enough to think we can make a difference in this world, bolstered by our love of Jesus Christ? The questions are difficult, and the answers take courage.

There's a bumper sticker that says 'Jesus is coming. Look busy!' It is funny, for sure, but it also points to the heresy of believing that as long as we're being *nice* people doing *nice* things, then we are good Christians, or more accurately, *nice* Christians. To be a follower of Jesus—to be a disciple—requires so much more. A transformed life means that you can never go back to simply being *nice*. It implies that the church has a deeper quest than humanitarian groups and clubs. Those are good things and we should be part of them, but that is not why the Christian church exists.

William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury during World War II, is quoted as saying, "The church is the only cooperative society in the world that exists for the benefit of its non-members." Think about that. We exist to benefit non-members. The people who are not us.

According to our Catechism, found on page 862 of *The Book of Common Prayer*, 'Our assurance as Christians is that nothing, not even death, shall separate us from the love of

God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.’ This assurance gives us the faith to share this promise with those who are outside our walls – those who are the reason we exist. Our Baptismal Covenant on pages 304-305 in the Book of Common Prayer reinforces this as it asks us to persevere in resisting evil, repent and return to the Lord, proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ, seek and serve Christ in all persons, and especially strive for justice and peace among all people, respecting the dignity of every human being. This is a tall order, but we don’t have to strive alone: we have God and we have each other.

We may wonder how we can join in God’s work outside our church walls when we feel that what we are already doing so much within. Perhaps looking outside is overwhelming and we do not know where to begin. Most of all, it is sometimes difficult to find or interpret the messages that we are receiving. In his book *Seek God Everywhere*, the Indian Jesuit priest and psychotherapist Anthony de Mello suggests:

In all actions, in all conversations, Ignatius [of Loyola, the founder of the Society of Jesus] felt the presence of God and contemplated the presence of God. He enjoyed that mysterious gift of seeing God. So we are entitled to be called contemplatives in action if in all things and all actions we feel the presence of God and contemplate the presence of God. We can see that this is not the same as doing the will of God in everything.

To find God, to see God in all things, or to be a contemplative in action means much more than doing God's will in everything. To feel and contemplate his presence is the experience of devotion, peace, quiet, and consolation... How do we attain this grace of finding God in all things? In all the documents I have read there is a key word: solely, only, or entirely. That is the key word -- doing it only for God.

When we become quiet, when we become still, we are finally able to listen to God. Only then can we act. We hear the crunch of the master’s sandals on the road and begin to light the lamps. In Paul Showers’ children’s book, *The Listening Walk*, a young girl enjoys taking walks with her father and their old dog, Major, who does not walk very fast. “On a Listening Walk I do not talk,” she says. “I listen to all the different sounds. I hear many different sounds when I do not talk.” At the end she tells us, “You do not even have to take a walk to hear sounds. There are sounds everywhere all the time. All you have to do is keep still and listen to them.”

All we have to do is be still and listen to God, to listen to Love. God will take care of the rest. Amen.

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