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| Matt 13:1-9 James 2:19-27  | Listen Well | Pinelands – 9am – 31/12/2023Thornton – 10:30am – 31/12/2023 |

**St Francis of Assisi** said…

 ***“Preach the Gospel at all times.***

***Only when necessary, use words.”***

Often the most powerful…

 **Witness, Sermon, Testimony…**

 Is received **when…** we are **SILENT**

 We **LISTEN**

Some **Trivia Information…**

 The words **“SILENT”** and **“LISTEN”**

Both contain the ***same letters.***

So… To LISTEN well… We need to be SILENT

 Being SILENT… Helps us LISTEN well.

**Taylor Caldwell,** Novelist author wrote a book…

***"The Man who Listens"***

In that book she makes this comment…

 ***"The most desperate need of humanity today***

***is not a new vaccine for any disease,***

***not a new religion or a new way of life.***

***Our real need - our most terrible need is…***

***for someone to LISTEN to US,***

 ***NOT as a patient, but as a HUMAN SOUL.***

**Roberta** tells her story of a conversation with her Mother-in-law…

 While her in-laws were travelling home

after a holiday their car broke down **3 times.**

Just as **Roberta** was going to tell her own worst "break down" story,

 her mother-in-law had to hang up…

because someone was at her door,

**BUT…** before she said goodbye she said this to her daughter-in-law.

  ***"Thank you so much for listening,***

 ***BUT… thank you most of all…***

 ***for not telling me your worst car story."***

**You know someone like that?**

 You telling your story… **But** they tell their ***‘BETTER’*** story.

**How many times has that happened to you?**

***AS Christians*** we need to **Listen *and* Hear…** **MORE**

**Listen *and* Hear…**

the hearts cry of the people we meet.

**DO WE…** really ***LISTEN ? LISTEN*** to those around us.

With the invention of…

‘Whatsapp’, ‘Instagram’, ‘E-Mail’

 Plus, all the other Social Media platforms

With our FAST PACED world of…

 Instant Gratification, Demands for Success and being NO: 1

We have got used to… Very Poor LISTENING SKILLS

When we really ***need*** to **TALK** to someone… ***AND…***

We really ***need*** for them **to LISTEN**.

**Maybe…** It is about a problem with…

Friends or Family,

A Crisis you are going through

A Hurdle you are facing

We really ***need*** for them **to LISTEN**.

**THE LAST THING WE NEED…**

 **IS… for them to finish our story with…**

 **Their *‘BETTER’* STORY**

**INSIDE** **you want to… scream** and say,

***“Wait a minute… I need to talk…***

***I don't want your advise,***

 ***I don’t want your story,***

***I just want your ear.”***

**But instead,** you patiently wait…

as they talk about ancient history…

while you are thinking about current events.

**Or maybe…** you've just discovered a lump,

**or**  you've noticed your jeans are getting tighter,

**or**  you are struggling with a breaking relationship

And you really need to talk to someone,

so you give a friend a call.

**BUT…** **they interrupt your story with their story.**

**We do not LISTEN well.**

How many times have you done the same thing?

 *Instead of* ***really LISTENING,***

*you* ***interrupt*** *the speaker…*

to talk about what is on your mind…

to tell your story or a similar experience.

**We do not LISTEN well.**

***IT is possible*** *to be* ***listening*** *to someone talk…*

***without*** *really* ***hearing*** *what they are saying*

Not only is it possible, ***it happens all the time.***

 I know I am guilty of doing this exact thing.

 Someone is talking to me (esp: in a crowd)

and I get distracted by something else…

 I really have had to learn to focus.

**In those moments…** When we get distracted

We miss the chance to…

***"bear one another's burdens"***

 ***Rub souls with each other…***

 **Because…** we aren't really **LISTENING.**

***Are you listening? Are you really listening?***

**Or…** are you thinking about what you will do after church?

Are you **listening** right now?... **OR…** Are you **evaluating?**

Are you trying to ***hear what God*** has to say,

**OR…** are you ***grading my preaching?***

We ***NEED*** to Learn to ***LISTEN WELL.***

**Read –** ***Parable of the Sower…* Matt 13:1-9**

*(as much as this speaks of listening to God’s word…*

 *it can just as easily be applied to…*

 *our listening to others)*

**Here are some examples** ***of people who LISTENED WELL…***

As a minister I often get calls from undertakers to help officiate

at funerals for people who are ***unchurched…***

On one such occasion I remember going to the home of a widower

to make plans for the funeral service.

I introduced myself and he offered me some tea…

Then he began to talk, and talk and talk.

***For about half an hour*** he talked about his wife…

 Who she was,

What she meant to him,

 How he had felt toward her,

 How much they had loved each other.

When he finished we prayed together

 and then we spoke about the funeral details.

In that ***first half hour*** the prayer was the only thing I had said…

 ***Apart from my introduction.***

A few days later when the funeral was over…

 he came to me and said…

***"I want to thank you, Ross, for the things you***

 ***said to me when you visited me.***

 ***It meant so much"!***

I had said ***NOTHING…*** apart from the funeral details

I was just ***PRESENT…***

**my presence said,**  **"I CARE… GOD CARES"**

 **I had LISTENED well**

That widower was indeed touched by the love of Christ…

in a way that he hadn`t been touched for many years.

One on my colleagues, **Rev Ronnie Cawood…**

Tells the story of visiting a **recently widowed lady…**

 In the visit she began to tell him her story.

**Ronnie** **said nothing** but was so moved by her story…

 that ***he began to weep.***

 When the lady saw him crying she began to cry.

***We all know how that works***

Ronnie says he said very little through the whole visit…

**BUT…** as he was leaving the lady said to him…

 ***“Thank you for letting me know that it is OK to cry…***

 ***I have not cried in years.”***

**Sometimes our… *SILENT LISTENING…***

 ***SPEAKS LOUDER…* than thunder.**

Listening Well… Takes TIME and PATIENCE

Listening Well… LOOKS FOR JESUS in the situation

Listening Well… HELPS US CHOOSE…

the *correct words to USE.*

Good listening is… an ACT OF LOVE.

Good listening is… a deep form of MINISTRY.

**Listening** is **one of the easiest** things ***you’ll ever do,***

and **one of the hardest** to get **Right**

**James 1:19… “*Everyone must be quick to listen,***

***but slow to speak and***

***slow to become angry.”***

It’s simple enough in principle, and very difficult to live.

**Too often we are…**

***slow to hear, quick to speak, and quick to anger.***

So, learning to **LISTEN WELL** won’t happen overnight.

 It takes **TIME and PATIENCE,**

**I challenge you to…** LOOK for **JESUS…** ***and***

 CHOOSE your WORDS CAREFULLY.

**Theologian Diedrich Bonhoeffer said…**

***“Poor listening diminishes another person,***

***while good listening invites them to exist and matter.”***

Quote…

Here Bonhoeffer gives us something to avoid: “a kind of listening with half an ear that presumes already to know what the other person has to say.” This, he says, “is an impatient, inattentive listening, that . . . is only waiting for a chance to speak.” Perhaps we think we know where the speaker is going, and so already begin formulating our response. Or we were in the middle of something when someone started talking to us, or have another commitment approaching, and we wish they were done already.

Or maybe we’re half-eared because our attention is divided, by our external surroundings or our internal rebounding to self. As Dunn laments, “Unfortunately, many of us are too preoccupied with ourselves when we listen. Instead of concentrating on what is being said, we are busy either deciding what to say in response or mentally rejecting the other person’s point of view.”

“Poor listening diminishes another person, while good listening invites them to exist and matter.”

Half-eared listening, says Bonheoffer, “despises the brother and is only waiting for a chance to speak and thus get rid of the other person.” Poor listening rejects; good listening embraces. Poor listening diminishes the other person, while good listening invites them to exist, and to matter. Bonhoeffer writes, “Just as love to God begins with listening to his Word, so the beginning of love for the brethren is learning to listen to them.”

**Matthew 13:1-9 The Parable of the Sower**

That same day Jesus left the house and went to the lakeside, where he sat down to teach. The crowd that gathered around him was so large that he got into a boat and sat in it, while the crowd stood on the shore. He used parables to tell them many things.

“Once there was a man who went out to sow grain. As he scattered the seed in the field, some of it fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some of it fell on rocky ground, where there was little soil. The seeds soon sprouted, because the soil wasn't deep. But when the sun came up, it burned the young plants; and because the roots had not grown deep enough, the plants soon dried up. Some of the seed fell among thorn bushes, which grew up and choked the plants. But some seeds fell in good soil, and the plants bore grain: some had one hundred grains, others sixty, and others thirty.”

And Jesus concluded, “Listen, then, if you have ears!”

**James 2:19-26**

Do you believe that there is only one God? Good! The demons also believe—and tremble with fear. You fool! Do you want to be shown that faith without actions is useless? How was our ancestor Abraham put right with God? It was through his actions, when he offered his son Isaac on the altar. Can't you see? His faith and his actions worked together; his faith was made perfect through his actions. And the scripture came true that said, “Abraham believed God, and because of his faith God accepted him as righteous.” And so Abraham was called God's friend. You see, then, that it is by our actions that we are put right with God, and not by our faith alone.

It was the same with the prostitute Rahab. She was put right with God through her actions, by welcoming the Israelite spies and helping them to escape by a different road.

So then, as the body without the spirit is dead, also faith without actions is dead.