

## Setting our minds on Divine Things

Jesus said:

***"...you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."***

In our Gospel reading last Sunday Jesus asked his disciples if they knew his real identity. Imagine, if you will, the group of twelve gathered around Jesus as they sit on a grassy knoll above the city of Caesarea Philippi. The one called Peter answers with enthusiasm—even passion—that Jesus is the “Messiah, the Son of the Living God!”

I am going to take a little liberty and ad lib a bit about this story for a moment.

“Good answer Peter! Now, listen, everyone. This is important. My time with you is nearly up. I will be going to Jerusalem and some really bad stuff is going to happen. It’s going to be hard. The elders, the chief priests and the scribes are going to arrest me, have me beaten, and ultimately the crowds will demand that I be killed. But I promise. It will be ok. On the third day after my death I will be raised.”

But Peter can’t stand to hear this so he stops Jesus, “Come over here, for a minute Jesus. Don’t be saying things like that. It can’t happen to you. We won’t let it. I won’t let it. We need you with us.”

Jesus is disappointed, “Peter you are not hearing me. Instead you are thinking about yourself. You are making this about you. And you are partially right, but right now it is more about preparing all of you for what **will** happen. You are “focusing on human things. I need you to focus on divine things”. ***“Listen”***

It sounded like Peter was thinking of Jesus, but Jesus, being the perfect listener called out something that is so common—so human.

When someone is talking to you, how often do you turn your attention inward and start to think about yourself? I do it constantly. And I am often quite oblivious to it.

Earlier this year a local beloved adult child of God with a terminal illness died. A Stephen Minister had been assigned to walk this journey with this beloved adult. A few days after, the Stephen Minister wanted to talk with me about it. Sadly, my response was considerably different from what the Stephen Minister had expected. I was

distracted and thinking about several other things and so I asked a quite inappropriate question about the Stephen Minister's next steps. I was not listening. I was focusing—setting my mind on “human things.”

So now, let us consider how hearing, listening is an important way for us to set our mind on divine things.

Some of you know that this summer I enrolled in a 10 week class called Clinical Pastoral Education. In a nutshell, it was learning how to listen in a way to focus on the soul—where the divine in each of us lives. This can be listening to an individual, a group, or a whole nation; as God told Moses, “I have heard my people cry.”

Last Sunday Fr. Rob told us about the wisdom class he is taking that is teaching about a way of knowing Jesus called *three-centered knowing*; heart, mind, and body. Three-centered knowing is a gift that, when practiced, helps us to focus on “divine things.”

Our ears are unique in that they are part of the body that helps us know things both outwardly and inwardly. Our sense of hearing is so important that scientists for centuries have worked to create language and devices that help those with hearing deficits—including people who are totally deaf. This past week on our church calendar we remembered the lives of Thomas Gallaudet and Henry Winter Syle who started both schools and churches for the deaf in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. More recently devices have been created that bring sound to once deaf ears. It is heart stopping to watch some of the videos of children and adults hearing for the first time.

There are two parts to what our ears do. One is to alert us by various sounds as to what is around us. We hear without thinking about it. Our ears pick up constant sound whether we are conscious of it or not.

The other part of what our ears do is to help us to know one another and the world around us. The listening we do helps to tap into our deeper selves—our spirit or soul—where the divine lives in us. It is through the stories we share with one another that we find our connectedness.

Important to note about this sharing of stories is that we must actually listen intently not only to hear the content of the story, but also the feeling, the heart in the

story. Why is this person telling this story? Where do you find connection while at the same time hearing the heart—the feelings that are being shared with you?

This is the kind of listening Jesus asks his followers to learn. It is a way that focuses on divine things; listening with **our** soul to the soul of the other.

In my own listening story I told earlier, I mentioned a Stephen Minister. Stephen Ministry is a Christian ministry that is usually given by Christians who are not ordained. It is a ministry that is all about this special way of listening. When someone is going through a difficult time, a Stephen Minister can be “the ears of Jesus”; listening with empathy to hear their concerns. They connect on the soul level—setting their mind on the divine healing that only Christ can give.

Our ears receive the information and then it is processed in the mind. When we set the mind on the divine, then the information reaches the heart where empathy is kindled and Christ then fans that flame and moves us to express our love and support.

We listen not so as to get a chance to put our own two cents in. We listen so as to feel connection and thus empathy with expressions of love and support.

And still there is another level of this listening. It is one thing to hear our friends and family or even an individual we don't know well. This level is listening to the world we live in. And it can be more difficult.

This is the listening that God does—that Jesus did that sent him to the Cross.

Remember again from our Old Testament lesson, God said, “I have heard my people cry.” The cry of the Israelites was loud and clear and God moved Moses to stand before Pharaoh to demand freedom for God's people. Then God sent us Jesus who showed us all how to listen and to love and to stand for justice for the world God so loves.

God's ears always hear the cries of his beloved who are oppressed. And in every generation God has sent emissaries like Moses to stand before the Pharaoh's and demand justice. For nearly 2000 years God has sent those emissaries through Jesus Christ.

Christians who live in the United States are now being called to listen with their mind set on divine things in many ways. Two of those ways come quickly to my mind.

God's beloved people of color in this country are crying out for justice; particularly black people. We Christians, as emissaries through Christ, must hear, must listen intently to these cries; finding connectedness in that deep place where God's Spirit is active in us; fanning the flames of empathy that lead us to stand before the leaders of this country and demand justice through change in policies and laws that oppress our brothers and sisters of color.

This is not the only cry Christians will hear in this country. Mother Earth is crying out and we must heed her cry, again, to demand justice through change in policies and laws that allow for her abuse.

If we listen, we will hear many cries throughout the world that call to us for empathy and action.

Each one of **us** is called to a ministry of setting our mind on divine things. Using that incredible body part known as the ears to listen with your soul as part of your way of knowing Jesus will lead you to that special ministry to which you are being called.

It will always require listening intently. It will require allowing what you hear to penetrate your mind and reach down to your heart and fully into your soul to determine what cry you are called to respond to.

No doubt we all are being called to listen. No doubt we are being called to respond with empathy that moves us to love what God loves.

**That** is setting our mind on divine things.