

“Good Listening Embraces”

Meditation 1st March 2021

Following the Ash Wednesday Reflection by Helen Savage I’ve been thinking about something she said – how a really valuable thing from these COVID times has been, having the time to be able to listen to people more and to give people more time. That is certainly something to hold onto and to cherish. I have really enjoyed dozens of telephone conversations this past year, not only with friends and neighbours but with cousins normally only seen at weddings or funerals! It’s been marvellous to catch up and hear their news.

Have you ever been talking to someone and they seem to be looking over your shoulder or shuffling a lot or squinting at their mobile phones?

It can be irritating! It makes me feel a bit worthless, not valued and it can be a real let down but I’m guilty too of sometimes listening to other people in a rather half hearted way maybe thinking of things on the to do list or what is for tea that evening – which is just as bad! Yet to be a good listener is vital in so many ways; listening is an intrinsic part of any relationship and the Bible has plenty to say about it.

There is Jesus listening to his Father, God listening to us, us listening to God and us listening to each other – no getting away from how important listening actually is in our lives – but perhaps easier said than done.

I love some of Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s words about listening. He wrote -

“Just as love for God begins with listening to his word, the beginning of love for the brethren is learning to listen to them.” He says that there are many times when “listening can be a greater service than speaking” and that “We should listen with the ears of God that we may speak the Word of God”

Finally, “He who can no longer listen to his brother will soon be no longer listening to God either; he will be doing nothing but prattle in the presence of God too. This is the beginning of the death of the spiritual life. Anyone who thinks that his time is too valuable to spend keeping quiet will eventually have no time for God and his brother, but only for himself and his own follies.”

The importance of listening is spelt out very clearly in the Bible. There are many commands for us to listen and hear God’s messages and to communicate well with each other, which includes listening properly to others, as a sign of our love for each other.

James 1 v 19

Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger “

Romans 10 v 17

So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ

Matthew 7 v 24

Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock.

Mark 9 v 7

And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, "This is my beloved Son, listen to him."

John 10 v 27

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me

We can show people our love by listening to them and spending time with them. Listening to them shows that we care. It shows humility, that it is not all about us and our ego.

Philippians 2 v 3

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain deceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves.

Matthew 7 v 12

So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the prophets

God is our caring and loving father who listens to us when we pray. We are told this over and over again in the Bible

Psalms 18 v 6

I called to the Lord in my distress and I cried to my God for help. From his temple he heard my voice, and my cry to him reached his ears.

Meditation and quiet times help us to listen more carefully to God. Jesus set an example to his disciples by often retreating alone to pray as in Luke 4 v 42, Luke 5 v 16 and Mark 1 v 33 – 39. There was also his 40 days in the wilderness. He needed these solitary and quiet times to prepare himself for his ministry, listening to God and then acting on his father's words

John 5 v 30

By myself I can do nothing, I judge only as I hear, and my judgement is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me.

Some wise words from Mother Teresa on prayer and listening

"Prayer is not asking. Prayer is putting myself in the hands of God, at His disposition, and listening to his voice in the depths of our hearts "

"Good listening embraces" – how true but how hard that can be in our usually busy world with so many distractions but maybe during this past year we have all had a bit more time to reflect, be quiet, think about our faith, relationships and about God. Maybe we have also enjoyed listening to people more, enjoying their "virtual company" in some shape or form and realised how very special and valuable that is. I shall certainly be praying for help with good listening – to God and to people -when moving forwards out of these lock down times.

On the next page are the lyrics of a song called "I will listen" – on You Tube by Twila Paris – hope you enjoy it.

I will Listen

Hard as it seems
Standing in dreams
Where is the dreamer now
Wonder if I wanted to try
Would I remember how?
I don't know the way to go from here
But I know that I have made my choice
And this is where I stand
Until He moves me on
And I will listen to his voice

This is the faith
Patience to wait
When there is nothing clear
Nothing to see
Still we believe
Jesus is very near I cannot imagine what will come
But I've already made my choice
And this is where I stand
Until he moves me on
And I will listen to his voice

Could it be that he is only waiting there to see
If I will learn to love the dreams
That he has dreamed for me
Can't imagine what the future holds
But I've already made my choice
And this is where I stand – Until He moves me on – And I will listen to his voice