

## “A Season of Listening”

Acts 1:6-14; Psalm 68:1-10, 32-35; 1 Peter 4:12-14, 5:6-11; John 17:1-11

Before cellphones and Apple Watches there were windup watches that we used to tell time. Once upon a time there was a lost watch wind-up watch—perhaps like this one...

This was a long time ago before people had refrigerators, in parts of the world where the weather was very cold in winter, colder than our Michigan winters are now. It was a time people built houses to store ice in which it would last right into the summer. They used these icehouses to store their food to stop it from going bad.

These ‘ice-houses’ had very thick walls and no windows plus a door which fitted very well. In winter, when lakes and rivers froze over with thick ice, people would cut big blocks and haul them back to the ice house on sledges. They covered the ice with sawdust which helped it take longer to melt.

One day a man lost his watch while he was working in an icehouse. He and some helpers searched for it amongst the sawdust but couldn’t find it anywhere.

A small boy who heard about the lost watch slipped into the icehouse while the workers were having their lunch. He soon came out with the watch to the amazement of the adults. “How did you do it?” they asked him. “Well”, the boy replied, “I just laid down in the sawdust, and kept very still and quiet - and I heard the watch ticking. It was easy to find it then.” **The only way that the boy was able to hear the watch ticking was by being very quiet and still - by having patience.**

When Jesus left his friends and ascended back into heaven he promised his disciples he they would receive power when the Holy Spirit came, but he didn’t say when that would happen. So, they all went to a room together and they stayed there and they must have had patience because they prayed for days on end for Jesus’ promise to be fulfilled.

There must also have been times when they were quiet and still, just like the boy in the icehouse and I’m sure that when they were, that’s when they

were able to hear God speak words of encouragement to them to keep going because their prayers would be answered in time. There are times when we need to be quiet and still to listen for God's voice speaking to us. And, there were times for Jesus when he did this as well. He went to the desert, he climbed up a mountain for times of quiet.

This is the Season of the Easter, the time when Christians celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. It is a season of hope and listening.

During the conclusion of the Season of Easter we hope and we listen in the Risen Christ to direct us. We observe this particular season of listening until the Day of Pentecost which we celebrate next Sunday. **This is still the Easter Season for us.**

"Easter" comes from an old English word related to dawn and shining. At Easter we stand in light of the resurrection to see a new creation, transformed by the grace and glory of God. We celebrate the presence and power of the risen Christ in his church, proclaiming his good news through Word and Sacrament. We rejoice in the gift of the Holy Spirit, who is the "Lord and giver of life." In the fullest sense, Easter is a new way of life, in which we are "dead to sin and alive to God in Christ us" (Rom. 6:11); for this reason, it is an especially appropriate time to celebrate the Sacrament of Baptism.

Today we as the Church of Jesus Christ have celebrated four baptisms. It heralds a covenant with God, a beginning of a new life in Christ. The Christian life is a blessed life. We know that this is life where those who are baptized are cleansed from former guilt and shame, bathed and immersed with God's kindness and approval.

We also know that the Christian life is not an easy life. It is a life of competing voices. It is a life of voices outside of Christ's Way calling us to gratify our own desires without regard for ourselves, others, and God. "Go ahead, just do it. You deserve everything you want now." I will say that this is the Voice of the Evil One.

Then there are those voices within the Church that give contradictory messages. They say, "This is the Way." No, "this is the way."

**That is why the Christians after the Ascension of Jesus needed a “season of listening.” We all need seasons of listening otherwise we go off half-cocked in the wrong direction.**

Two millennia of Christian spirituality teach us that we must learn to listen to God just as the boy in the icehouse became quiet and listened for the ticking of the watch to receive direction to find it.

Phileena Heuertz is a spiritual director who says that finding ways to quiet ourselves to hear God’s Voice is necessary for all who follow Christ. It is transformative and gives power to actually live the Christian Life.

Phileena maintains that solitude, silence, and stillness catalyze a transformation and liberation:

*Solitude means that we have to learn how to be alone with ourselves and God.*

*Silence is necessary to follow Christ. Most of us do not know how to be quiet. Do we even know what the voice of God sounds like? Our vocation is marked by listening to the Voice calling us.*

*Stillness—Psalm 46 the psalmist echoes what God has told him. God says, “be still and know that I am God (Psalm 46:10)”*

Practicing stillness helps us to curb our impulses for affirmation, control, and security. Stillness helps us to gain freedom from misguided impulses.

What can I do for God?  
What can God do for me?  
What is it that I truly desire?

The depths of these questions can only be plumbed in a season of stillness.

**Jesus taught. He traveled. He healed. He confronted the authorities. However, when Jesus himself really needed power he found it on his knees.**

The High Priestly Prayer from our Gospel lesson in John 17 is a power prayer. It is a power prayer as he faces Crucifixion. It is a power prayer for those disciples who will witness this, fall away, and then pick up the pieces. It is a power for us and for all of us who follow his Way.

Two weekends ago I took a season of listening. I took a Guided Silent Retreat in Petoskey for four days. I am an extrovert. Four days of silence is a long time for me. In fact, after three days I was ready to go to a local restaurant and start talking with the first stranger I saw. Yes, I am one of THOSE embarrassing persons to be with!

In my journal (and I never journal) I wrote down some hard stuff about myself and others. I needed power to forgive one particular person who hurt me deeply and I needed power to let that stuff go. I needed power to move on from a part of my life when I was a fulltime pastor to now.

The only way for me and for you to do this hard work of following Jesus in power is to follow the way of listening—solitude, silence and stillness. THIS IS THE WAY. Amen.

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