Listening Anew

John 14:23-29 **First Presbyterian Church**
June 8, 2025 **Pastor Dave Carlson**

Kris Haig, in her article titled "Listening With the Heart," tells about coming across a card that said, "When your heart speaks, take good notes."[1] The Greek word for "heart" is kardia. It refers to the very center of physical and spiritual life.

This includes thinking, emotion, desire, will and moral decision. To "listen with … your heart" means to notice what God is revealing to you through all your senses – to listen with your whole being everywhere, at all times.

Today's New Testament lesson is all about listening. Jesus is talking to his disciples about his love for them and their love for him and the importance of following his teachings, keeping his commandments, as he says.

What does love have to do with listening to someone? Quite a lot, right? To help us get a sense of this let's do a little word substitution with today's scripture reading.

Jesus says to his disciples, "They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me, and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them." Let's substitutes the word "love" for the word "listen" and see what we get.

"They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me – who listen to me – and those who love me – who listen to me – will be loved –listened to – by my Father, and I will love them – listen to them –and reveal myself to them."

Here we see that the only way for Jesus to reveal himself to us is if we actually listen to what he says. And yet, we don't have Jesus with us in person like the earliest disciples did. But we do have the Holy Spirit. God sent to us the Holy Spirit to remind us of everything Jesus has said that we might listen to Jesus and let him shape our lives.

In our busyness and all the commotion of the world it can be hard to hear the Holy Spirit, listen to the Lord's teachings, apply them in our lives. In fact, the world we live in, for the most part, turns a deaf ear to the teachings of Jesus.

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[1] Kris Haig, "Listening With the Heart," Presbyterians Today, December 2000, 7.

It's hard to hear the Lord speaking to you when a car horn blasts you from behind; it's easier to blast back. It's hard to hear the Lord speaking to you when the kids are actively going against what you just said to them; it's easier to yell all the more. It's hard to hear the Lord when all you see is deadlines, chores and to-do lists; it's easier to hide from the world. It's hard to hear the Lord when you're worried and anxious about health issues - yours or a loved one's – It's easier to either give up or try to control everything.

It's hard, but with a little effort, it is possible; it's possible to listen for and hear the Holy Spirit gently guiding you even as the world pulls at you in the opposite direction.

Take for instance the father whose 4-year-old daughter, Katherine, was enrolled in two separate preschool classes. Each one was having a kid's program during the same week on two different days.

The father asked if it was important for him to go to both programs. Do you know what his little girl said? She said, "Um, I don't know." That response from a 4-year-old – "Um, I don't know" – when translated into adult, it means, "Yes, Dad, I do want you to come to both because you're my dad!"[2]

The reason we need to really listen is because it shows our love. It shows that we value people enough to hear them, to know them. And ultimately, listening to others shows that we truly do love the Lord.

You have countless opportunities to serve the Lord by simply listening. Jesus makes this point when he answers a question asked by Judas (not Iscariot) who says, "Lord, how is it that you will reveal yourself to us and not to the world?"

And the answer that Jesus gives is all about listening and love. Jesus says, "Those who love me will keep my word" – listen to my word – "and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them" – in them.

This is how Jesus is made known to an otherwise indifferent and often hostile world – by having the Lord live in us, through us, and having that shape our words and actions, what others hear and see in us.

So, ask yourself, do you have Jesus in your heart; does the Lord live through you? And if so, in what ways does that shape your words and actions, who you are in this world of ours?

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[2] Dr. James H. Rucker Jr., "On Listening," Monticello, Indiana.

For those of you who like homework – and for those who do your homework on the fly – make a list; make a list of five things you know about Jesus. That's column one. Then, in column two, list five ways that what you know about Jesus shapes or could shape your words and actions, your responses.

Here. I'll go first. I know that Jesus is a friend to the friendless. And this has shaped my relationship with our friend Matt, who happens to be homeless again, and who really needs a friend in his corner. I strive to be that friend, even though it's not easy to set proper boundaries for Matt on behalf of this church, which believe I'm doing.

That's one thing on my list. And I've got others, but I won't take time to share them all with you now. Well, maybe just a couple more. I know that Jesus was slow to speak, slow to anger. And this helps me try to do likewise, even though I, too, can get short with people. But knowing Jesus like I do, I am blessed to respond with grace and mercy more often than not.

And finally, I know that Jesus gave all the glory to God, as do I, knowing that without the Lord in my life, I am nothing, and that all that is good and kind and faithful about me comes from the Lord.

The point is, we all struggle to be more like Jesus and less like those who are ignorant of or opposed to the Lord. As Jesus says, "Whoever does not love me" – whoever does not listen to me – "does not keep my words…."

The world is full of people who don't know the Lord. It's full of people who know the Lord but don't listen to his teachings. It's full of people who listen but don't follow his teachings. And sadly, there are people in this world who listen and then act in direct opposition to what the Lord teaches, people who want that shiny object the world dangles before them more than they want Jesus in their lives or in this world.

Our calling as Christians, in a world such as this, is to listen to what Jesus is saying to us, personally – everyday – and then respond by letting it shape our words and actions. This is how Jesus reveals himself to others who do not know. This is how Jesus speaks and act in a world that doesn't seem to be listening or caring.

So, make that list of five things for yourself – five things you know about Jesus and five ways that it shapes your words and actions. And as you think about your list, know that Jesus is revealing himself to this world through you, as together we minister to others as the hands and feet and heart of Jesus. Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER

Gracious God, what a gift it is to be your church. We do not take this role lightly. We need unity; we need your guidance; we want to represent you well to a broken world.

Thank you for rooting us in Christ and gifting us with the Holy Spirit. Open our eyes to the Spirit's presence.

When the church fails, give us grace. When we succeed, may we give you all the glory. May all that we do and say be only for your sake and for the greatness of your name.

It is in your name, O Lord, that we pray for those who need you most, and especially for in need of your healing mercies. We pray also for those searching for a sign of hope and encouragement amid the world's troubles. Embolden us to testify to your presence in the world, to reflect your love for all humanity, and to open our hearts to being changed by your Spirit, for the upbuilding of your church, all to your glory, Lord.

We pray in the power of the Holy Spirit, whom you sent among us, as promised by your only Son, Jesus the Christ, who taught us to pray together, saying:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.