

Listening at the Lakeside

Isaiah 9:1-4; Matthew 4:12-23

It is said that good conversation begins with listening. I wonder, however, how many of us are not actually listening but simply waiting to speak. We'll all be familiar with the saying that when God created us God gave us two ears but just one mouth. All of our senses are important, but in the context of our faith, I wonder if seeing and hearing are most important of all.

Last week we wondered what it was that the first disciples saw in Jesus that made them want to follow Him. In a different telling of those very early days, the challenge is to think about what it was that the first disciples heard from Jesus that made them want to follow Him.

Jesus is at the beginning of His ministry. John the Baptist has been arrested, Jesus leaves His home town of Nazareth to go to Capernaum which is by the sea – not so close to the sea these days as the Sea of Galilee has shrunk a little – but it's still close. It is the area prophesied by Isaiah. It's also the place where, geologically, the hard black igneous rock of the north meets the soft, white limestone of the south. If you go to the sea shore you can see it in the stones that are there – it is – geologically – the place where dark meets light.

But that's still a seeing thing. What about the listening? I think there's some listening before Jesus even opens His mouth. Before Jesus even says, 'Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand', listening has taken place. It's not listening by the embryonic disciples, it is listening by Jesus. Remembering things that were said in Nazareth, remembering the words of John the Baptist by the Jordan, passing through the little streets of Capernaum with their ordinary people, and their fishermen, Jesus had been listening all the time.

Listening to the joys and sorrows of people talking as they went about their everyday lives. People loving and hating; people cooking and cleaning; people struggling to make ends meet or, to quote the Prime Minister, getting by but not getting on; maybe even the people President Trump claims to be talking about – the forgotten who are forgotten no longer. (Let's see about that). Rich people, poor people, young people, old people. Working people, like the fishermen

by the lakeside. Is it the case that, having met them at the time of baptism at the Jordan river that flows into the Sea of Galilee, Jesus remembered them and tracked them down. Imagine being stalked by Jesus!

But He found them, and as He had listened to them, so Jesus now spoke to them and they listened to Him by the lakeside. When He spoke, talking about a time to repent, which means to turn around, these fishermen were already questioning and wondering and restless. When Jesus spoke, it chimed in with what they were feeling, that something in their lives and in their worlds needed to change, or shift, or move, and not knowing what it was exactly, the words of Jesus shone on that feeling of restlessness.

Augustine, one of the early writers of the Christian Church, opens the first book of his *Confessions* with the prayer and statement that, “our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee.” Jesus listened to the restlessness, by the lakeside, and spoke. I wonder if that is why, when Peter and Andrew, James and John heard it, all they could do was follow and obey.

Would that it were that easy to discern the voice of Jesus today. There are so many competing voices. Maybe we need to note that today’s reading does not finish with the disciples laying down and leaving their nets and following Jesus. The reading ends with, “And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every infirmity among the people.” To discern if a person is worth following or not, we need to examine the person behind the voice we’ve heard. Is what is being said consistent with the extravagant, inclusive love of God? Listen to what Jesus said by the lakeside, then look at what He did.

It is not only the two people before us today, making their public profession of faith, who are listening by the lakeside in Morningside. It is true for all of us. Like the fishermen of Galilee, we will all stand at a fork in the road, facing big decisions about jobs, lifestyle, family, friends, retirement, where we live, relationships and so on. We will all have moments when we act in ways for reasons that we cannot completely explain.

Some will be led to do heroic, extraordinary things with their lives because of what they have heard and what it has impelled them to do. But for most of us our lives are not so dramatic. We don't often drop everything to start a new life. When it comes to faith, most of us feel called to less dramatic discipleship. Passages like this from the Bible seem more dramatic than what happens to us on most Thursdays.

"Maybe Jesus' disciples had days when it did not seem sensational, as they walked up and down Galilee from village to village, through Samaria to Jerusalem and back again. Maybe they had days when they thought things were slow, when Jesus did not heal anyone...On those days, maybe the disciples followed as we follow: with modest faithfulness."

I suspect, as for the first disciples, it is the listening at the lakeside, when we are going about our ordinary, everyday business, when we are most likely to hear God. It is not only in the grand believing, but in the ordinary behaving that what we have listened to will be seen in the way we live out our lives. In the practice of kindness, in the sharing of daily bread, in the welcoming of strangers, in the love of the lonely, in the daily routine, what we have listened to will be seen.

When we listen to the voice of Jesus, by the lakeside of our everyday lives, we will be enabled to live in hope and forgiveness. We will find that, "Love spreads word by word. The bucket fills drop by drop. Wrongs are righted one by one."

Even in our busy, cluttered lives, Jesus will walk along that lakeside and keep speaking until at last we listen and hear. So that in our living in the never-to-be-forgotten moments, and also in the forgettable moments – we can be assured that our God is right there by our side.

The novelist John Updike said, "I will try to work steadily in the spirit of those medieval carvers who so fondly sculpted the undersides of choir seats." Or perhaps like those fishermen mending their nets down on the shores of the lakeside. Whatever we are doing, our ears half-cocked to eternity, we might, much to our surprise and everlasting delight, hear the voice of God walking through the heat of the day, or the cool of the evening. God is still speaking, are we still listening?

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen