

“When You Listen, What Do You Hear”
Mark 11:1-11

A Communion Meditation
from the Pulpit of St. Giles Presbyterian Church, Greenville, South Carolina
Palm Sunday/Passion Sunday, April 5, 2009
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“My wife says I never listen to her. At least I think that's what she said.”

At least that what I think she said . . .

When we read scripture, it's easy not to hear it. It's too familiar. It's too strange. We're too busy. There are so many other sounds, so much distraction, so much noise.

A Greek philosopher wrote that “We have two ears and one mouth so that we can listen twice as much as we speak”.¹ Sometimes we don't hear anything but the sound of our own voice. Often, we don't listen twice as much as we speak.

As we move into Holy Week what would happen if we really listened to the story of Jesus' last week. When you listen to this Palm Sunday text from Mark (and as you remember the story from the other Gospels), what do you hear?

I. When you listen to this story, do you hear Jesus' voice?

When we hear the voice of a friend, it gladdens our heart. We're eager to spend time with and to hear more from him/her. In John's Gospel, when Mary is at the tomb looking for Jesus, she finds her risen friend, but she mistakes him for the gardener. They exchange some words. But when Jesus says her name, she recognizes him. Was it the combination of her name *and his voice* that did it?

When you listen to this story, do you hear Jesus' voice? His welcome? His love?

II. When you listen to this story, do you hear the disciples being obedient?

No doubt the disciples didn't know the deeper reasons why Jesus was asking them to fetch that donkey, but they did it anyway. They did it anyway. It wasn't about transportation into town. It might have had something to do with fulfilling the scriptures. Jesus did that a lot. But no matter to them. They were just being faithful. They were being obedient. They were doing what they had been told to do by a friend they trusted.

Do you hear Jesus inviting us to be obedient in a similar way? Do you hear Jesus inviting us to trust him even when we don't fully understand what we're being asked to do, to be, to become?

III. When you listen to this story, do you hear *Jesus* being obedient?

While the disciples are doing what Jesus is asking, Jesus is doing what God is asking: be obedient, serve, teach, set free, heal, redeem, preach, love.

When you listen to this story, do you hear *Jesus* being obedient . . . even to the point of death on a cross?

IV. When you listen to this story, do you hear the crowds?

Bystanders asked the disciples on that day questions, and bystanders have asked the church questions ever since. "What are you doing?" "Why do you do that?" "Can't you worship God on the golf course?" "Why do you sing songs?" "Why do you spend so much time helping others? After all," they say, "God loves the man who helps himself."

They think that line is in the Bible! They don't really mind that it's not. No, they are full of assumptions, and they don't care too much that many of their assumptions are not grounded in what's real. And they are full of questions, questions.

People ask questions about what the church does. They don't understand the ashes on our foreheads on Ash Wednesday, they don't understand why we say a prayer of confession every Sunday, they don't understand that Jesus' Supper is a communion with the Divine.

When you listen to this story, do you hear the crowds? The shouting, singing, praising voices, the women and men and laughing children? Do you hear your own voice in that crowd? Your own shouts? Your own questions? Your own hopes? Your own excitement?

Those crowds are fickle, just like the crowds are nowadays. On Sunday they shout "Hosanna." On Thursday, "Crucify." Today we say, "I'll serve you Lord." Tomorrow we say, "I don't have time." Now we say, "You are my Lord and my God. Alleluia!" Later we say, "Jesus? Jesus who?"

The big crowds are shouting and throwing down their coats and waving palms. They want to honor Jesus. "Hosanna," they shout. "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"

And many others are asking questions. Why? Why? WHY? Why this noise? Why this commotion? Luke, in his gospel, tells us that the crowds were so noisy, the Pharisees ask Jesus to tell his disciples to put a lid on it, to keep it down. "If these people were quiet," Jesus says, "the very stones would shout out."

When you listen to this story, do you hear the crowds?

V. When you listen to this story, what do you hear in Jerusalem?

It's a big city. Do you hear the zoom of carts? People trading goods at the gate. People hawking food. It's a festival day in a crowded, holiday place.

VI. When you listen to this story, what do you hear in Bethany?

A quieter place, outside Jerusalem's gates. Do you hear the lady, who on Tuesday, would crack open a jar of costly perfume and wash Jesus' feet with it? The disciples are angry. What an enormous waste of money, they say. But Jesus corrects them. *She has honored me. Since when is serving God with extravagance a sin? Learn from her, church, learn from her. What she has done will be remembered forever.*

VII. When you listen to this story, what do you hear in the temple?

The singing? The prayers? Folk sitting on the steps talking church politics, what this council did, what this religious leader said? Do you hear the old lady, sitting alone, quietly reciting the psalms of David from heart?

VIII. When you listen to this story, what do you hear?

Benedict said that listening is as much a function of the heart as anything. *Listening is a function of the heart.*

I invite you to listen this week. Let's listen together. Let's *help* one another to listen. Come to church this week (Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter Sunday) and pay attention. Listen, listen, listen.

Listen to the donkey clop into Jerusalem with a King on its back.

Listen to the children sing.

Listen to the teacher teach and the crowds scratch their heads.

Listen to the meal being shared in the upper room.

Listen to the disciples snore.

Listen to Jesus pray.

Listen to the followers run away.

Listen to the rooster crow.

Listen to the mob shout.

Listen to the whip crack.

Listen to the nails ring.

Listen to the host of heaven sing:

What Wondrous Love Is This? O my soul? O my soul?

What Wondrous Love Is This? O my soul? O my soul?

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On Sunday we'll hear from a man all dressed in white, standing at the mouth of an empty tomb. But this week, *this holy week*, what will we hear? Come to church this week and let's help each other to listen.

Come to the table and listen to the one who said, "Come unto me all you who labor and are heaviliy burdened..."

ⁱ [Epictetus, Greek philosopher associated with the Stoics, AD 55-c.135]