

Are we listening?
Feast of the Visitation
June 1, 2020

Today we hear the familiar passage of Mary's Magnificat at the Visitation, and it is set against the background of a news cycle that shows us another familiar story, a story of injustice, division, hatred, and sin.

In our tradition we say the Magnificat on a regular basis, as many as 7 days a week as a part of our liturgy for Evening Prayer, and in our nation, we hear time and again of the effects of broken systems and people with tragic and avoidable consequences.

As I wrestle with what to say in this juxtaposition of the Visitation when yet one more in a series of unprovoked and unnecessary deaths occurs, I cannot help but find myself wondering, are we listening?

The Scriptures remind us that a part of the broken human condition is people who have ears but do not hear. Sadly, that is true of both the Magnificat and of the systemic issues of race and inequality in our nation. Too often do we listen with our outward ears to the words we say and to the senseless acts which occur on a daily basis, and we simply do not hear.

How often do we, do I, pray the Magnificat without thinking about what we say so that when we're done praying, we go back to our lives unchanged, no different than we were 20 minutes before? And how many times do we ride out the ebb and flow of the latest heartbreaking event until the cycle has run its course in the news and social media, and we go back to our lives as if nothing happened at all?

Brothers and sisters in Christ, we need to listen and hear. We need to hear anew the words of Mary that it is not pride, or power, or riches, or anything else with which we can save ourselves. We can either choose to submit these to the Kingdom, to be used in the service of the Lordship of Jesus Christ, or in the fullness of time they will pass away with nothing to show for them save the emptiness of a self-serving life bereft of love for God and for neighbor.

Likewise, we need to hear anew the cries of pain and sorrow which come up from those under the weight of injustice and oppression. And drawing near to them, we need to listen, to really listen, to what is being said. To hear what is going on. Too often is the temptation to offer platitudes and other empty gestures, or perhaps to respond with some "answer," but the root of such things is found in making ourselves feel better. In the discomfort we must listen to others, not to respond, but to truly hear.

Listening plays prominently in our celebration of Pentecost yesterday, a time when the barriers between tongues, nations, and peoples came crashing down so that the Good News of Jesus Christ could be heard around the world. So that the Good News of the Cross and Resurrection of our Lord could be for anyone and everyone. So that we could understand that listening to God in

prayer is a movement of the Holy Spirit in our lives; and that we would come to know in the proclamation of the Gospel to listen to our neighbors as a movement of the Holy Spirit as well.

When we have all the answers or at least when we think we do, we have no room to hear from God nor do we have room to hear from those who cry out for justice, dignity, peace. But when we empty ourselves, setting aside pride of place, power and position, when we begin to pour out ourselves and our resources in service to others, service to those who are truly most in need and not simply most like us, then we make room. We make room for the love of God and for the love of our neighbor to grow within us. When we learn to listen, we make space to really hear the words of Scripture and the story of others, learning to live out the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

It is for us to sit with the lowly and the oppressed and to hear their story, to listen to George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbury, their family, friends, and so many more, letting them and their stories soak into our minds and our hearts so that, like the Scriptures that we pray, it becomes bit by bit, a part of who we are. So that as we listen, we let our hearts break open, and by God's grace it becomes a part of how we live the words we pray.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.