

“Listen Up”

Ash Wednesday Service

Here’s what I want you to do: Find a quiet, secluded place so you won’t be tempted to role-play before God. Just be there as simply and honestly as you can manage. The focus will shift from you to God, and you will begin to sense his grace.

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

Feb. 17, 2021

Pastor Jenothy Irvine

Prayer - Open our ears - wake us up to the truth found in you. Walk us from the dust of the ashes to the glory of the cross.

Message

Please tell me I am not the only one to have those moments when you just can’t take it anymore; whether its kids arguing, the teenage music blaring, the office drama pouring, political poison flowing from all sides, the family shouting, or any other noises of life you can think of, and you just get to the point where you want to cover your ears, and say, “I can’t hear you!”

I figure that when it comes to listening, it's either the scenario I just described OR you get to the point of being fed up trying to get anyone to listen to you! Like the little kid who was all over the internist years ago, trying to get his mom to listen to his reasoning, saying, “listen to me, Linda, Linda, listen to me, listen Linda...”

Listening is essential for the development of intimacy, trust, healing, and wisdom. Often it is when we need to listen the most, we are like the child putting their hands over their ears saying, “I can’t hear you, I can’t hear you.” Lent is such a time. A time when we are called to listen to and listen for the presence of God in our life.

Listening. One of the most basic and essential skills to have or cultivate. Also one of the most difficult and sometimes complex abilities to develop and put into practice. Some people are born talkers and some are born listeners and

somewhere in between is the rest of us. But even on our best days, do we listen with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind?

I wonder church, can you listen to the following words of Jesus...

Read Text - Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

Ash Wednesday is the start to the season of Lent: traditionally a time for Christians to honor, observe, and reflect on the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus and based on the 40 days he spent in the wilderness following his baptism. Historically it is a time of spiritual preparation before the celebration of Easter. It is a practice for the whole congregation to be reminded of the mercy and forgiveness proclaimed in the gospel of Jesus and the need we all have to renew our faith.

This year, the season of Lent is inviting us to set aside whatever it is that gets in the way of our listening and listening well to the places, ways, and people God may use to speak truth, mercy, forgiveness, compassion, and forgiveness - words of life.

Beginning tonight, from the dust of the ashes, we ask you - we challenge you to listen up! Imagine Jesus coming to your living room, sitting on the couch, looking you square in the eye and saying, look, this is no game. I need you to listen and listen well.

And so we ask, what you might learn about God, others, and yourself from an intentional time of listening. What might rise from the ashes and give you hope, life, peace, wisdom, or healing? We encourage you to follow Jesus' example of walking the wilderness, trusting God, leaning on the Holy Spirit, and listening for the way to be made known, the lessons to surface, and the truth to be made known.

Listen up and consider questions like: What is it that God is trying to tell you? Who are the people that speak truth to you? How do you live into the truth when it is uncomfortable or challenging? What does Jesus teach us about listening with all that we are? What does it mean to listen with our heart, soul, strength, and mind? How will you be changed over the next 40 days?

This year we are using the works of a group called, Living Compass, and the devotional guide put together by them (SLIDE) to walk us through our 40 day experience. Beginning tonight, and each day through Lent, there are readings, scripture, and questions for reflection. It is our prayer that we can use this as a tool to come closer to God and to one another knowing that as a church body we are participating together. You can get a copy here at church or by going to the link on our website for the digital download.

Lent is one of those experiences that we do together alone. It is like we are all taking a long walk in the same direction (Eugene Peterson), and we can't do the work for anyone else; we can't make it easier, sneak the answers, or offer short cuts. Each believer needs this time to draw near to God; to refocus and recenter themselves; maybe realign themselves with what truly matters rather than all the distraction and noise that has crept into the heart, soul, body and mind. To do that we must be willing to listen.

And when we listen we might not like what we hear - truth can be hard to hear. Being reminded of what mattered most to Jesus and how our lives are to echo his love, compassion, mercy, and grace can be hard to hear. But listen we must.

We remember Jesus' words - his call to listen up and remember what matters in our journey of faith. It is in the wilderness we are given the opportunity to hear things differently; to listen more intently and to grow in our understanding of faith and following Jesus.

Over the next several weeks we will explore what it means to listen to those closest to our heart. We will be challenged to listen to our longings - that which is closest to our soul. We will be invited to listen to where we find strength - our body, and finally to listen to the insights of our mind. Heart. Soul. Body. Mind. All forms of prayer and listening to God.

To begin this journey, we remember we were created from dust in the hands of the creator and to dust we shall return. We mark our foreheads or hands as a way to identify our Lenten journey, and our commitment to self-reflection and examination. For the next 40 days we commit to seeking wisdom, truth, and spiritual formation and to pursuing an understanding of sacrifice, prayer and discipleship.

To do so, we will need to listen with all that are.

May it be so.