

Sermon for Sunday, February 26, 2023

First Sunday in Lent

“Listen”

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Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Decorah, Iowa

[Click here to read scripture passages for the day.](#)

Beloved People of God, grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus.

Who will you listen to? Whose voices, what messages fill your head, your days, your dreams? In the garden, Adam and Eve allow the snake’s manipulative voice to become louder than God’s voice. In the wilderness, Jesus defies the tempter’s deceptions by listening to what is truer and deeper. Who will you listen to? What voices and messages help you to know what is true, help you to be open and curious rather than calloused and closed off?

Rev. Sarah Speed, of *A Sanctified Art*, offers a poem inspired by this Gospel passage. As you listen, consider what you would add.

Who Will You Listen To?

Twitter or the BBC / the ads on late-night television / the wind as she blows / the echo of children playing / the quiet of snow / the ice bucket challenge / the phone when it rings / your pastor / your mother / your doctor / your gut / the tension in your shoulders / the restaurant singing happy birthday / audio books / TED talks / the rhythm of the music / the coffee drip in the morning / your therapist / the wisdom of the enneagram / the way your heart comes alive when you’re being creative / the man on the corner asking for change / the kid on the subway selling chocolate / the labels on the makeup bottle that promise timeless beauty / the magazines that tell you need timeless beauty / astrology / the Dow Jones / the hiss of the radiator / the pitter patter of little feet / financial advisors / the top 40 pop / the top 40 country / the *New York Times* / the rumor mill / the Book of Psalms / your sense of self / Jesus, when he says, “I am with you, always.”¹

As I prayed with this poem this week, I came up with a few more that I’d add for us as a community, especially after Pastor Marion, Brooke, Paul Skrade, Jack Geenen, and the choir helped the congregation listen so well last Sunday! If you were away last week, as I was, I encourage you to experience the service on YouTube ... / Birdsong / bells / the police report in the paper / the six o’clock siren / the woman at the food pantry, at the legal clinic, at the community meal / Good Shepherd youth inviting generosity every Lent / the voice of the triune God that calls you beloved child of God / the promise we speak with every baptism: *When the world tries to rename you, we will remind you of your true name.*

Who will you listen to?

Jesus defies the tempter’s deceptions by listening. Jesus pays attention to the fullness of scripture, even when the tempter tries to twist it. Jesus tunes into the Spirit who leads him even when the way is difficult. The Spirit helps him to know that his gifts are to serve something greater than his

¹ Who Will You Listen To by Rev. Sarah Speed. Purchased from A Sanctified Art LLC ©

physical hunger. Jesus soaks in that heavenly voice that calls him Beloved at his baptism, right before he's led into the wilderness. That voice helps him to know he can trust God; that he doesn't have to test God. Jesus has listened to the suffering of his people living under Roman oppression and to his prophetic mother Mary. He has learned that power is to be used for connection rather than domination.

Listening to what is deeper and truer is what gets Jesus through the wilderness with all its trials and temptations. Listening helps us to get through as well. What helps you to listen to God; to tune into the promises that you are God's beloved, that you are forgiven, that you are never alone; to tune into the ways God leads us to justice and mercy and wisdom?

Sometimes listening to God involves sound-words spoken in worship, the song that lingers with you, the voice of a loved one. Yet sometimes listening involves silence. Sometimes it means noticing your breath moving in your body, or the ways we breathe together as we sing. Other times we listen by lingering with a letter, an emotion, a piece of artwork. The art we have today is titled *Tune In*, by Rev. Lisle Gwynn Garrity of *A Sanctified Art*. Her piece and her artist's statement can help us to listen anew to the wisdom of this story.

She writes:

"In this image, the words of the Tempter hover in the background. The Tempter's voice lingers like a ringing in Jesus' ears, saying: 'Take charge. Hoard your power. Dominate. Control.' Somehow, Jesus has deciphered that these words are simply background noise. He closes his eyes and goes inward, wrapping himself in a posture of self-embrace. From this introspective perspective, Jesus essentially says, 'Get behind me, Satan.'

The backdrop of this piece resembles the dust of the desert. Like sand washing along a beach, the sediment shifts into water in the top left, hinting at what bolsters Jesus in his ministry: his belonging to God. His belovedness washes over him, giving him the courage to defy the deception of the Tempter and tune into his inner wisdom. In this way, he is given a new song to carry with him, a lullaby from God that goes, 'You, my child, in you, I am well-pleased.' This is a melody for singing, a song for dancing.

What are the voices that linger with you like a ringing in your ears?

What are the messages that try to deceive or devour you?

Let those voices buzz and fade into the background.

Close your eyes, tune in, and embrace yourself.

From your belovedness, what song will you sing?"²

² Artist Statement on *Tune In* by Lisle Gwynn Garrity – inspired by Matthew 4:1-11. Original silk painting with digital drawing and collage. Purchased from A Sanctified Art LLC ©