

Sermon for: Trinity Lutheran Church, Manilla

Second Week in Lent—February 24, 2024

Sermon Text: Mark 8:27-38 (Gospel Lesson)

Sermon Title/Theme: "Listen!"

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

The counselor had one word written on the notepad as she prepared for the counseling session: LISTEN! The most effective way to truly understand and help her client was to listen to her situation and needs.

To "listen" is a helpful reminder to all of us in our daily routines and formal conversations. "Listen" spouse, parent, child, client, friend, or pastor to truly understand others. "Listen" before you share your insights or opinions. "Listen" is Jesus' direction to Peter and to us as we explore today's Gospel reading.

Impulsive Peter often had difficulty listening. His boisterous personality caused him to speak quickly and confidently. Rather than listen to Jesus' warning Peter steps out of the boat and tries to walk on water. Instead of quietly reflecting on the glory of the Transfiguration, Peter proposes setting up three tents. As the Passion account unfolds, Peter refuses to listen to Jesus' warning and finds himself denying His Savior. Today's account takes place sometime before the infamous encounter in the courtyard of Caiaphas.

Near the end of Jesus' earthly ministry, He poses a question to His disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" When others share the public opinion polls: John the Baptist, Elijah, a prophet; Peter confidently speaks his heart, "You are the Christ." If only Peter would have kept his

mouth shut and listened from that point on. When Jesus goes on to explain the truth of Peter's statement, Peter could not hold it in any longer. The dialog goes something like this:

Jesus: "Who do you say that I am?" Peter: "You are the Christ, Lord."

Jesus: "Yes, I am. But I am about to die. I will be murdered. I will be put to death. However, I will rise again."

Peter: "Stop! Wait a minute Lord." (Peter's reaction is almost violent.) "I am not going to stand by while you allow yourself to be a victim at the hands of political enemies."

Jesus' response to Peter is strong. "Get behind me, Satan! Set your mind on things of God." We might paraphrase Jesus' response. "Be quiet; to try to stop the Father's plan of salvation is devilish."

Jesus had clearly spoken about His mission throughout His earthly ministry. Only through His death could He fulfill the prophecies concerning the Messiah. Peter and the disciples hadn't listened carefully. Peter wanted to detour from God's plan for the sacrifice of the Son. Peter did believe that Jesus was the Christ. Yet, he failed to understand that the Christ must die. Jesus had said, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again."

The prophecy disturbed and even angered Peter. Peter had believed Jesus would fulfill his role as Christ through the physical restoration of Israel. Jesus was thought to be a political savior bringing about a kingly restoration. All of Peter's hopes were in jeopardy. All those hopes

would die if Jesus was killed. There would be no earthly kingdom, and Peter was not about to standby as his vision was shattered.

The scene is a high school basketball game. The parents (and grandparents) sitting in the bleachers claim to be greater experts than the coach who has been working with the team throughout the year. “What’s he doing that stupid thing for?” “Why is he running that play?” “Why isn’t ‘so and so’ in the game?” Ideally, the all-knowing fan could come down out of the stand, march onto the court, and take over coaching the game. Obviously, ignorantly, they have no idea as to the game preparation and the coach’s play-book and plan for the game.

In today’s lesson, Peter wants to step into the game and take over as coach. He has become fed up with all this nonsense about the Messiah dying. “For the sake of Israel,” Peter reasoned, “Jesus must be kept safe. He might hurt himself. Perhaps he is sick.” How foolish of Peter.

Peter failed to understand that the sinfulness of the world had to be punished. He failed to understand that the only person who could endure the punishment and complete the plan of salvation was the Son of God. He did not realize that the death of Jesus would reverse the curse of death itself, and that we who were born in sin would be set free to stand righteous and pure before God. In his act of trying to save Israel by keeping Jesus safe, Peter would have muddled up God’s plan, and the world would have remained damned. If only Peter would have been quiet and listened, perhaps he would have understood.

Peter’s problem is also our problem. Failing to listen to and understand the words of Jesus, many are quick to speak in our culture and even in the church. “The Bible cannot mean what it says.” “The words of Paul are just reflective of the society of his day. They do not apply to us.”

Whether the topic is Christ-centered living, relationships between husband and wife, sexuality, morality, life, etc. we tend to value our opinions more than the words of Scripture. Like Peter, we place ourselves in the judgment seat as experts of God's plan. Failing to listen we do not hear God's judgment of our sin and His plan of salvation. Failing to listen we miss out of the plans and purposes that God may have for us that are beyond our understanding. Our Lord bids us to come down from our lofty opinions to be obedient to the words of the Psalmist, "Be still, and know that I am God."

While Jesus' words to Peter are confrontational, they are also compassionate. "Be quiet!" leads to the blessing of hearing of Jesus' crucifixion and death for our sin and to the truth of the Easter victory that comes at the conclusion of our Lenten journey. Jesus promises, "On the third day, I will be raised to life again."

Peter would hear his own words of denial, "I don't know the man." Again, he would be confronted with his sinful nature and sinful words and deeds. Peter would see the disappointed and condemning look of Jesus. Peter would also listen to the fulfillment of Jesus' promise. The angel directs the women at the tomb, "Go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you," (Mark 16:7).

Peter, who had difficulty listening, is called as Christ's witness and is inspired to share with the early church, "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness to his marvelous light," (1 Peter 2:9). We too listen to God's affirmation in Christ.

With a change in context and voice tone, words can have different messages.

A parent's "Listen to me!" may remind a child of the parent's rightful authority. Jesus confronts Peter, "Listen to me!" rather than the devil's temptation of your own sinful desires. God's Law gets our attention. We hear "Listen to me" rather than the voices of the world or our selfish desires.

A concerned mentor or a friend may compassionately share, "Listen, I love you and care for you." Peter, also heard of Jesus' forgiveness and even of His restoration, "Feed by sheep, Peter." Today we listen to Jesus' special invitation to us, "Take, eat of my body; take drink of my blood for the forgiveness of your sins." In worship we listen to God's Good News for us.

Commissioned by Christ, Peter becomes a spokesperson for the reality of Jesus' death and resurrection. Boldly and confidently Peter stands before a Pentecost crowd and before hostile audiences, pleading "Listen! Listen to God's truth to you. Listen to God's invitation to you. Listen, believe and be saved." As the church, we too become the mission voice asking family, friends, and neighbors to listen to Jesus. A traditional African song made its way into our hymnal (LSB #833). The words are appropriate for our emphasis today, "Listen, listen, God is calling through His Word inviting; Offering forgiveness, comfort, and joy. Jesus gave His mandate; share the good news that He came to save us and set us free. Listen, listen, God is calling."

Listen to God's call and commission for you, in Jesus name! Now may the peace of God which knows no human understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen.