

**Let Anyone With Ears Listen!**

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

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July 12, 2020

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. And he told them many things in parables, saying: “*Listen!* A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. *Let anyone with ears listen!*”...

“*Hear* then the parable of the sower. When anyone *hears* the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path. As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who *hears* the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away. As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who *hears* the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing. But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who *hears* the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.”

This is the Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Let anyone with ears listen. This parable and its explanation are all about listening. Deep and honest listening. Jesus starts speaking to the crowd by saying listen! He tells the disciples to hear the meaning. And in his explanation he talks about how the seed is the word of God and depending on how we hear it, will determine the results. We must hear the word to understand.

So what do we hear when we hear this parable about the sower and the seeds and the soil? My first hearing thinks of these soils as representing differences between people or between our hearts. My first thoughts are these must show us four different types of people. I wonder if some people are predestined for good soil and others for bad soil. Upon a second reading and listening to the parable, I start to wonder if the soil is all about what we make it. Is this a parable about our hard work to till our soil, to open our hearts to the word of God? Have I slowed down enough to truly understand the parable, to discover its depths, to truly listen to the word of God that Jesus is speaking? Because Jesus says, "Listen!"

And as I sat with this parable and listened again, I started to notice that I could see myself in each of those four soils. If we look at the disciples for example, who Jesus unveils the meaning to, we see that they have all four types of soil within them. They are sown on the path when they misunderstand and misinterpret again and again. They are sown on the rocky ground when they spring up with

swords to defend Jesus because they do not have deep roots of love. They are sown on the thorns when they all abandon Jesus because they are scared of the authorities and being arrested. But they are also sown on the good soil as we see them take up the call of love in the book of Acts going forth into the whole world.

The words hear and listen used by Jesus in the parable are more than simply using our ears. Jesus is encouraging us into a deep and spiritual listening. It is the idea of listening with our hearts and minds filled with compassion to truly understand. And we listen with our bodies with intention, the intention to turn our hearing into action. This is not the common listening we do with the news or on facebook where we are simply looking for confirmation bias or planning our snappy comeback. This is a deeper listening to hear people's voices and hearts. To understand them with the intent to love them. This spiritual listening that Jesus advocates for here may sometimes look like challenging people after listening compassionately and other times may require self-reflection to understand our own blindspots.

And I believe that there are modern day prophets calling out injustice in our world today. I hear "Black Lives Matter." I hear "Defund the Police." And upon first hearing these calls, I honestly did not respond as well as I would like to admit. I wondered if Black Lives Matter meant all lives. I wondered if Defund the Police

should change its messaging to reform the police or fund our communities. I responded defensively, wanting to protect my own white privilege and comfort rather than truly listening and understanding the calls of our modern prophets. But upon a second and third and repeated listening to these messages, I have started to grow and change in my understanding. I started listening with compassion rather than defensiveness when I was told that whiteness is killing black people. I started to understand (well maybe not fully understand but at least believe) that the black experience in general in the United States looked very different than mine. I begin to hear and see the fear that exists towards the police in communities that have been over policed and over criminalized their entire existence in this country. I begin to believe the black leaders calling for transformation of our laws and politics. I begin to understand and then can turn my understanding into action.

The call to a deep and spiritual listening requires compassion. It requires us to slow down from our defensiveness and to truly listen. And many of the things may not be easy for us to hear. But are we willing to listen?

What are we listening to today? Are we listening to the voices of the oppressed or have we insulated ourselves into an echo chamber? Are the prophetic words falling onto the hardened path of misunderstanding and tone policing? Are the words falling on rocky ground that quickly turns into changing our facebook

pictures and reposting on instagram but dies as soon as it is not popular again? Are the words falling on thorns so that our comfort, our wealth, and our privilege keeps choking out the messages of justice? Or are the words falling on good soil? Soil that is ready to hear the pains and cries in our world.

Because once we truly and deeply listen, our intent is to turn our understanding into action. We are not meant to stay in a listening posture forever. We listen with compassion to understand. And we listen with intent to act. So we act by rooting out the white supremacy in our own hearts and we act by dismantling the thorny systems built upon oppression and violence, always with a listening posture that follows our siblings of color.

Today we begin our listening as we explore the book “So You Want To Talk About Race.” This book will challenge our thoughts and sensibilities. All are welcome to attend even if you haven’t read it yet but I encourage you to come with the posture of listening so that through compassion and understanding we will be able to act. God is throwing the seed indiscriminately. It is for you and you and you and even you! How will you hear these words this morning? Where will the seed fall?