

Welcome

Have you noticed how difficult it has become for us to listen? We don't listen to each other on social media. We don't listen to people who have different perspectives from us. But even in mundane, everyday interactions, we struggle to listen. How often have you been watching TV or playing on your phone when someone (like your wife!) says, "Did you hear me?"

And you realize someone was talking to you, saying something probably pretty important, but you didn't hear because you were distracted. Tuned out. Concentrating on something else.

If this happens with people in our lives, how much easier is it for God's voice to be drowned out in our lives? Many of us struggle to hear from God at all, and even those of us who know well what it is to experience God's voice find it challenging to hear from God consistently.

Today we're going to talk about why that is. We'll explore the sin of busyness and ask what it would take for us to make some space in our daily lives to hear from God. Because we can't listen *to* God until we listen *for* God. We can't follow God until we hear God.

So stand and sing with me. And as we sing, think about the weekly routine of your life. Think about where God might be speaking that you aren't listening.

Message

[**Not listening to Jesus**] Today is Palm Sunday. It's the beginning of Holy Week, the last week of Jesus' life. Holy Week begins with Jesus being welcomed to Jerusalem as the Messiah. It ends just six days later, on Good Friday, with Jesus' crucifixion. This was Jesus' plan all along, but that doesn't explain everyone *else* in the story.

Jesus told the disciples repeatedly that he was going to be crucified. But they abandoned him in fear. And the crowds - how could they go from hailing Jesus as their long-awaited Messiah to shouting for his death in less than a week? On Palm Sunday, they welcomed Jesus as the prophesied king come to destroy Rome, and by Friday, they're calling for Rome to execute him as a pretender king.

At the heart (and we'll be exploring this more on Good Friday) is the painful reality that neither disciples nor the crowds were really listening to Jesus. They allowed themselves to be lulled into a false sense of security by their expectations of Jesus.

The disciples expected Jesus to be a conquering Messiah, a winner. They expected him to destroy Rome. So no matter how many times Jesus told them he would be crucified by Rome, they couldn't hear him. Because they weren't listening.

Same with the crowds. They looked for a Messiah to restore the glory of old Israel. So when Jesus spent Holy Week challenging the priests and scribes of Israel rather than the Romans, they turned on him.

Jesus came to Jerusalem to die, to lose. He was clear about this all along. Throughout his whole ministry, this was the kind of Messiah he showed himself to be. But no one could hear him, because no one was listening.

Palm Sunday is the final Sunday of Lent, the season of the Church year we set aside to examine ourselves for hidden sin, confess that sin and prepare for Easter.

[Map Graphic] This year, our series has been called Lent is for Losers. We've walked through the story of Israel's repeated failures to be God's people, and in their failures, we've seen reflections of our own. We began in the Garden, where we saw our first sin is a failure to trust God. Then we met Abram, who reminds us that God calls us no matter who we are. After that, we wandered in the wilderness with the freed slaves and saw how often we reduce faith to feelings. Next we met Samuel, who showed us that too often we see things as the world sees them rather than through God's eyes. And last week, we stood with Ezekiel as God asked whether we really thought our dead bones could live again.

Today, we confront our inattentiveness. We face how we, like those around Jesus, allow ourselves to be lulled into a false sense of security by false images of God. And we face how those images make us deaf to the God who calls us to follow him all the way to the cross.

[Scripture Slide] Turn with me in your Bibles to Isaiah 50. Back during Epiphany, we heard two of the four so-called Suffering Servant songs. This is the third Servant song. These are poems written by the prophet to describe the experiences of a person who follows God faithfully. The Servant is at once the prophet himself and the ideal picture of the whole faithful people of God.

So as we read, we recognize that this is the person God calls each of us to be. But as we read, we'll also recognize that none of us has been this person. We've all failed to listen to God. So let's read together and let the prophet call out our failure:

The Sovereign LORD has given me his words of wisdom, so that I know how to comfort the weary. Morning by morning he awakens me and opens my understanding to his will. The Sovereign LORD has spoken to me, and I have listened.

I have not rebelled or turned away. I offered my back to those who beat me and my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard. I did not hide my face from mockery and spitting.

Because the Sovereign LORD helps me, I will not be disgraced. Therefore, I have set my face like a stone, determined to do his will. And I know that I will not be put to shame. He who gives me justice is near.

Who will dare to bring charges against me now? Where are my accusers? Let them appear! See, the Sovereign LORD is on my side! Who will declare me guilty? -- Isaiah 50:4-9

Morning by morning, God speaks to me, and I listen. Can any of us say that every morning, the first thing we do is listen for God speaking to us? I know I can't.

And after God speaks, the prophet obeys. He knows that to follow God's way will make him an object of mockery. But that doesn't stop him. He continues to be faithful, to follow God's call. He knows that God will not allow him to be disgraced.

How many of us can say we've never kept quiet when we should speak up? How many of us can truly say fear has never kept us from doing what God calls us to do? I know I can't.

After Jesus' death and resurrection, Christians turned to these servant songs to find illustrations of Jesus' faithfulness as well. They saw that unlike God's people, unlike us, Jesus remained faithful to God, even to the point of death.

They saw that it was precisely Jesus' faithfulness that led him to the Cross, that, in retrospect, his story couldn't have ended any other way. And they saw the resurrection as proof that God was with him, that his way was righteous.

[God drown out by other voices] Friends, unlike the Servant, unlike Jesus, we don't listen to God. We get distracted by all kinds of noise that drowns out God's call on us.

Some would have us believe that God doesn't actually care about us, that God is distant, uninterested or powerless. (Yet the cross demonstrates how fiercely God loves us and the lengths to which God will go to rescue us.)

On the other extreme, we've heard that God wants us to be rich, that it's okay to prioritize success over everything else because God wants to "bless" us. (But it's hard to look at the Cross and see wealth and blessing.)

And some of us have gotten very comfortable in the middle. But when we're comfortable, it's easy to believe the voices that tell us that God doesn't care about outsiders and neither should we. They claim that what matters most is me and mine. (But if that were true, God would've stayed in Heaven and left us to our destruction.)

We think that God helps those that help themselves, as though we are somehow excused from caring for the most vulnerable. (But the whole point of the Cross is that we are utterly helpless to save ourselves!)

We convince ourselves that God calls us to a safe faith, a happy life, as though the biggest concern for the God of the universe was that we not be too bothered. (But as the cross demonstrates, faith is anything but safe.)

We wonder if God can actually make a difference in our lives, or if all this talk of resurrection is just pie in the sky.

With so many voices shouting at us, no wonder we're confused. No wonder we're all turned around. No wonder, like the disciples and the crowds, we get the Living God confused with all these false images of God around us.

This is sin. It's deadly to us, to our families, to our vocations, to the world. God's way leads to life, and we can only walk that path if we are following God, listening for the Spirit's voice, taking the next right step.

We so often think of God as only speaking grace to us. And this is true, but God's grace requires honesty about failure. Consider this in relation to any of your close relationships in your life. If they only speak kindly to you, there will be a shallowness to the relationship that is unable to acknowledge or deal with problems, and one side will be taken advantage of. But this requires us to learn to listen to the other person, to really hear them.

How can we follow God's call if we cannot hear God's voice? Friends we cannot listen *to* God until we listen *for* God. We have to clear away all the voices competing for our attention and sit, waiting for God. The Church has long practiced Silence as a way to open ourselves to hear from God. Intentionally creating space every day to sit and listen and wait for God to speak.

The sin of busyness is one that plagues me. So this year, for Lent, I committed to add a daily time of prayer and silence. Every morning, I have sat with a prayer book. I have read prayers, offered prayers of my own, read Scripture, and asked God to speak to me.

This practice - which adds about 15 minutes to my daily routine - has made this season of Lent particularly powerful. God has shown me sin in my life. But more importantly, I have heard God calling me. I have had a clearer sense of what my next steps are.

And of course I have. Of course I've heard God's voice. Because, as the prophet said, God speaks to us every morning. But too often I don't listen for God. I don't clear away the clutter, put away my phone, and listen. I listen for the God who created me and calls me.

How can I know what my next right step is without listening for God's voice? The truth is, I can't. If I don't make space to listen for God, I'll end up like the disciples, fleeing in fear from my calling. I may even end up like the crowds, so committed to the wrong picture of God, I end up working against God's way in the world.

I can't obey unless I hear. We can't listen to God until we listen *for* God.

The only hope we have is the Cross. As we stated at the beginning of Lent, it is on the Cross that God's character and nature are most fully revealed. The Cross acts like smelling salts for all of us who have been lulled into a sense of false complacency by the voices around us. It is when we follow Jesus to the Cross that our ears are opened and we can hear God calling to us.

Examen + Confession + Communion

So before we do anything else, we must approach the Communion table. It is at the Cross Jesus speaks most clearly to us. When we see God crucified, we come face to face with the God who shatters all our false images of God.

On the Cross, Jesus calls us to come and die with him. Jesus embraced the pain of death that our ears might be open to the Spirit's call. You don't have to be a member of Catalyst to receive communion. If you are willing to listen for God, then to obey what God says, you're welcome to come forward.

Examen

1. When in the last six weeks have you heard God's voice clearly?
1. What in the last six weeks has distracted you from listening for God's voice?
2. What in the next week might distract you from listening for God's voice?
3. How can you listen for God's voice during this Holy Week?

Confession:

Leader: We live in a loud world, with many shouting false gods at us. We have not

People: Open our ears, Lord.

Leader: We have ignored your voice, calling us to the responsibility of living in your freedom.

People: Lord, speak to us.

Leader: We have stained our souls by our action and inaction.

People: Cleanse us, Lord.

Leader: We are broken by disease, bruised by the sins of others, weakened and unable to repair ourselves.

People: Heal us, Lord.

Leader: We ignore your call to center our lives in you, and so are deaf to the hopes and cries of the poor, the sick, the needy, and the earth.

People: Ground us, Lord!

Leader: When we confess our sinful ways, God abundantly pardons. In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven.

People: In the name of Jesus Christ, we are all forgiven

Prayer

Blessing/Assignment

In a world as busy as ours, we cannot hear God unless we listen for God. We have to clear away all the voices competing for our attention and sit, waiting for God. The Church has long practiced Silence as a way to open ourselves to hear from God.

I want to challenge you this week, as we prepare for Easter, to create some silent space in your life. Spend at least 10 minutes in silence listening for God. You can read Scripture or use a Prayer of Examen like we did this morning, but put away your phone, get by yourself, and sit for 10 minutes without distraction, listening for God to speak.

Friends, let's not be like the disciples. As we prepare for the celebration of Easter, let's not skip past the pain of the Cross. Because the Cross is where we see God fully revealed. By following Jesus to the Cross before we approach the empty tomb, we see God's intentions and avoid twisting God's power to our own ends.

So this week, listen for God. And when God speaks to you, obey. Do what God says. Take that next right step of faith. But remember, friends, we can't listen *to* God until we listen *for* God. We can't obey until we hear.