

To Hear and Be Heard

Ezekiel 2:1-5

Mark 6:1-13

July 4, 2021

Rev. Donna Vuilleumier

Ezekiel 2:1-5

He said to me: O mortal, stand up on your feet, and I will speak with you. And when he spoke to me, a spirit entered into me and set me on my feet; and I heard him speaking to me. He said to me, Mortal, I am sending you to the people of Israel, to a nation of rebels who have rebelled against me; they and their ancestors have transgressed against me to this very day. The descendants are impudent and stubborn. I am sending you to them, and you shall say to them, "Thus says the Lord God." Whether they hear or refuse to hear (for they are a rebellious house), they shall know that there has been a prophet among them.

Mark 6:1-13

He left that place and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. On the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, "Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him. Then Jesus said to them, "Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house." And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. And he was amazed at their unbelief.

Then he went about among the villages teaching. He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. He said to them, "Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them." So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.

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Listen my children and you shall hear of the midnight ride of Paul Revere, the ride that alerted the townspeople that the British were coming to Lexington and Concord, the ride that called the patriots to gather to fight and resist, that ride that ultimately led to the American Revolution. Just as Paul Revere needed everyone to hear his news that the Regulars were coming out, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wanted everyone to hear, to remember, what happened on that one April night in 1775. Listen, hear, remember. It seems that even before we are old enough to know why a man named Paul Revere took a midnight ride, we have heard this sing song sentence.

Listen. I have something very important to say. I need you to hear me. Listen. Pay attention. The colonists had been trying for a long time to be heard. They wanted representation and they did not want to pay taxes without benefitting from them, yet no matter how loudly they

protested to the British government, they would not be heard, they would not be listened to. When they would not be heard, it ultimately came time to break free, to shake the dust off, and gain independence as a separate country.

To hear and be heard impacts everything. It impacted colonists in a new world, it impacted how a prophet responded to God's call, how Jesus and the disciples were denied in his hometown while welcomed elsewhere, and how we are heard—or hearing--in our own relationships and daily encounters. Hearing involves depth and attentiveness, it requires focus on words, concerns, needs. Wanting to be heard is a basic emotional need.

In *'The Lost Art of Listening,'* author Michael Nichols says that “few motives in human experience are as powerful as the yearning to be understood. Being listened to means that we are taken seriously, that our ideas and feelings are known and, ultimately that what we have to say matters. The yearning to be listened to and understood is a yearning to escape our separateness and bridge the space that divides us.....To listen is to pay attention, take an interest, care about, take to heart, validate, acknowledge, be moved, appreciate.”

In the early 1800's, John Vianney wanted to be a priest but his seminary teachers thought that he was too stupid. His pastor though felt that he was a pious young man so the bishop ordained him and sent him to a tiny backwater parish where he do no real harm. But John had a special gift—he was incredibly good at hearing confessions. He would listen deeply, truly hearing what was being said, as well as what had not quite found a voice. He encouraged, he cajoled, he consoled and he pardoned in God's name. This was not just for the 230 residents of the community, but for everyone who traveled to him from near and far as his reputation for hearing, truly hearing, deeply listening, spread widely. For 40 years, for up to 18 hours a day, he heard of errors, poor decisions, regrets, omissions, bad habits, intentional wrongs, and all of the vices. Some struggled with anger against God for injustices and sought to be forgiven so that they could forgive God. When someone needed, wanted, to be heard, he would hear. There was healing, hope, reconciliation and validation because he could hear and others could be heard. He paid attention, took an interest, cared about, took to heart, validated, acknowledged, was moved, and appreciated their spiritual and emotional efforts.

While some people, such as John Vianney, go out of their way to hear others, to be sure that God's message is heard, others go out of their way to *not* hear. That was the path that led to Ezekiel's call to prophecy that we overhear in Scripture. Generations of Israelites have ignored, have not heard, have not listened to God, or for God. The rebellious ancestors and their descendants are impudent and stubborn as they continually turn a deaf ear. In due time, in a time of exile, God sent a prophetic messenger to speak to the people, someone who shared their faith, their history, their struggles, their distress. Ezekiel's success as a prophet did not depend on how Israel heard him, but on how Ezekiel heard God and responded. Even when there seemed to be little hope for the Israelites, even when so much had been lost, a prophet was still raised up by God and sent to speak to a stubborn people, knowing that some would hear, and some would not. Ezekiel—like any prophet---like anyone with a prophetic voice—is called to speak the truth regardless of the response. What needs to be heard may not be popular but it will be faithful.

Like Ezekiel, Jesus had teachings from God to be shared, and he clashed with those from his own community who would not hear him. Jesus was rejected and not listened to because the people could *not hear* the man they could *not see* past. They had known Jesus the boy, the teen, and now the man. They had known his family, and his time as a carpenter. They were deaf to his new prophetic teachings because they were blinded by their old memories of him. “Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are

being done by his hands! Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?” And they took offense at him. Even though his touch healed a few people in their presence, their deafness, blindness and unbelief persisted.

Just as Ezekiel’s success as a prophet did not depend on how Israel heard him, but on how Ezekiel heard God and responded, Jesus’ earthly ministry did not depend upon on how the Jews and Gentiles heard him as it did on his prophetic voice to speak the truth regardless of the response. ‘Listen, I have something very important to say,’ as Jesus tried to encourage the community and his family to listen, to pay attention. He needed them hear him, to hear God’s message that he was born to teach. But he received rejection and deaf ears.

What Jesus tried to call his own community to hear was not popular or accepted, but it was faithful. In the shadow and silence of that rejection, Jesus prepared his disciples for those who would hear them, and those who would not listen so that they were left with no choice but to shake the dust off their feet and move on.

On this Independence Day in which we remember our national ancestors who were not listened to, and as our history reminds us of other times when we were not heard, or others have not heard us, we must also remember what we claim on Pentecost, that the spirit of prophecy has been poured out on all believers, so that we too all have a prophetic message of God to share. What voices do we need to hear today? Who is crying and trying to be heard? Who needs us to listen, to pay attention, to take an interest, to care about, to take to heart, to validate, acknowledge, appreciate and remember? We too are ones with a prophetic voice-- called to speak the truth regardless of the response. What needs to be heard may not be popular but it will be faithful.

I am sending you to them, and you shall say to them, “Thus says the Lord God.” Whether they hear or refuse to hear (for they are a rebellious house), they shall know that there has been a prophet among them. Amen.