

## John 1:35-47

Two men were walking along a crowded, busy city sidewalk. Suddenly one of them remarked, "Listen to the lovely sound of that cricket." But his friend couldn't hear it. He asked his companion how he could detect the sound of a cricket amid the roar of the traffic and the sounds of the people. The first man, who was a zoologist, had trained himself to hear the sounds of nature. Instead of an explanation, however, he reached into his pocket, retrieved a quarter and dropped it on the sidewalk where-upon a dozen people began to look about. He looked at his companion and said, "We hear what we listen for."

Auditory scientists tell us most of us spend 70% of each day in communication. The majority of that time involves listening, yet, it's the area in which most of us are the least efficient. Listening is paying close attention to, and making sense of, what we hear.

Listening is an art and a skill we all need to practice. The truth is, most of us are better talkers than we are listeners. Now I know many husbands, including myself, are accused of selective listening, but even when people do pay attention, most walk away remembering only 50% of what they've heard. It's so easy to forget, no wonder we all need so many reminders!

We all need to become better listeners, but there are different kinds of listening. One kind is listening to other people's stories and sharing encouraging words. A second kind is spiritual listening. When we listen to God in prayer and study we mature in our faith. Thirdly, our Christian journey begins with listening to the words of Jesus and then deciding whether or not to become a believer, a follower; or in biblical terms, his disciple.

I want to focus on this third occasion for listening today, listening to the words of Jesus. On several occasions Jesus said to those around him, "Let anyone with ears to hear, listen." (Luke 14:35) I don't think he said that because what he had to say was so eloquent. I think he said that because he expected a response from those who heard what he said. If they paid attention and understood the implications of His words, they would have to DO something about what he said. And so do we.

After Christmas we enter the liturgical season of Epiphany, a time when we study the life and ministry of Jesus. We acknowledge we are on a spiritual journey, looking for God, for a Savior, just as the Wise Men were. The end of the searching is Jesus Christ, but some have abandoned the journey or haven't really understood the goal, so let's go back to the beginning of Jesus' ministry and listen to the story of the calling of his first disciples. Perhaps we all could use a reminder--so listen up!

Our scripture today is the Apostle John's telling of the story. After hearing John the Baptist's proclamation that Jesus was the "Lamb of God," two of John's disciples chose to leave John and follow Jesus, one of them was Andrew. They wanted to know more. What happens next is very interesting. When Jesus saw they were following him, did he give them great words of wisdom or endearing words of love? No. The first words of Jesus in the Gospel of John as written in the NIV are "What do you want?" In the NRSV it reads, "What are you looking for?"

What they wanted, what they were looking for, would determine what they would hear from Jesus' teaching.

Were they legalists wanting to debate little details of the Law like the Scribes and Pharisees?

Were they nationalists looking for a military commander who would overthrow Rome like the zealots?

Were they driven by ambition looking for position and power like the Sadducees?

Or, were they simply puzzled, bewildered, sinful men looking for a meaningful life and forgiveness from God?

Jesus' question is relevant for us today as well.

If we choose to be a disciple of Jesus and follow him, or choose to continue following him, what do we want from him? What are we looking for?

The answer determines what we will hear.

In fact, why are we here today?

To fulfill an obligation?

To assuage guilt?

To hear promises of health and wealth and protection from all hurts and disappointments in this world?

To connect with a religious genie who will grant all our requests?

Or, to search for a kernel of hope, a moment of peace, a promise of forgiveness, or a word of encouragement that will bring meaning to a frenetic lifestyle of "go, go, go" and "more, more, more?"

If we know what we want, we will know what to listen for.

When Jesus asked the two men what they wanted, they responded with another question, "Teacher, where are you staying?" This was more than just an inquiry about which motel Jesus was booked in. In our day we might say, "Jesus, where are you coming from? What are you all about? Where can we hear more?"

Jesus' simple reply was, "Come and see." Jesus was giving these potential disciples the option to choose to follow him. Come and see. It may or may not be what they were looking for. Jesus knew he couldn't give everyone everything they were looking for. Come, listen, and then decide if you want to follow me.

That's what we need to do, too: come and listen, then decide.

If we pay attention we learn Jesus doesn't want groupies or admirers; he wants people who are willing to stay with him through thick and thin.

Please listen and understand this:

The life Jesus offers as a disciple is a life of grace and giving,  
not greed and getting.

It's more about joy than happiness,

more about significance than success,

more about adventure than achievement,

more about pursuit than possession,

more about passion than predictability,

more about serendipity than security,

more about forgiveness than faultfinding.

more about commitment than comfort.

And the most important: it's more about relationships than rules.

He wants us to consider the cost of discipleship. He won't trick us or over-promise. The truth is, God wants a life of discipleship for everyone, but not everyone wants God in their lives. You know some who don't. Why? Usually it's because they perceive God as being too nebulous, too angry, or too intrusive. Even some who go to church on Sunday hear the words of discipleship but they don't really listen and grow in faith. Why? Because it's hard. And, there are so many other enticing voices to listen to, Jesus is not the dominate voice heard.

Once during a summer baseball game in Kansas City, a dog casually appeared on the playing field. It trotted around the infield and then sat down on third base. The people in the crowd began to yell at it: "Get off the field," "Run for home," "Bite the umpire." But the yelling was to no avail; the dog just sat on third base. One sports writer, commenting on the incident later, explained that the dog didn't move because there was no dominant voice from the crowd.

For some people Jesus Christ has become the dominant voice in their lives. For them the Gospel defines who they are; it defines their life mission. When times are serious, when they're afraid to get out of bed because of life's monsters, they know there's Someone they can trust, Someone who knows them by name, Someone who will listen to them. Someone who will watch over them like a shepherd and walk with them when they go through the worst that life brings, even death.

We who have chosen to be disciples believe we have found in Jesus what we have been looking for. We come to church to listen and be reminded about what being a follower really means. Most sermons are just reminders of what we already know, because it's so easy to forget. We come to receive encouragement from each other because the rest of the world doesn't hear what we hear and marches to the beat of a different drummer. No, Jesus never promised the Christian life would be easy, just worth it.

When we find what we want, we usually share our discoveries with others. That's why Andrew ran to Simon to tell him the Good News: they had found the promised Messiah, the Christ, the Son of God. It's interesting that when Andrew brought Simon to Jesus, Jesus looked at him and immediately gave him a new name, Cephas, or Peter, which means "rock."

Jesus sees what a person is, but also what he or she can become, the actualities and the possibilities. Jesus saw Peter as a Galilean fisherman, but also as a rock on which the Christian church would be built. When Simon Peter decided to become a disciple, his life was never the same; not easy, certainly not perfect, but not boring!

Someone once saw Michelangelo chipping away with his chisel at a huge shapeless piece of rock. He asked the sculptor what he was doing. Michelangelo answered, "I am releasing the angel imprisoned in this marble. "

Jesus is the one who sees the unique potential in each of us and can release the hidden promise. Committing our lives to him allows him to make us what we have in us to be. In other words, it's never too late to be what you might have been. The older we are, our future may take a different form, but it's still good. Our God is the God of second chances--and more. It's never too late to decide.

Peter and Andrew were the first, but not the only ones who had to make a decision about Jesus. Also in today's scripture Jesus meets Philip. He challenges Philip with those familiar words, "Follow me." Philip listened and decided to go with him. Then Philip likewise went to his friend, Nathanael, challenging Nathanael's doubts with Jesus' own words, "Come and see."

It's a challenge we all have to ponder, especially if we've been listening to other voices in some area of our lives. Hopefully, today we have heard some encouraging words that will "keep us keeping on" in our faith, in our service, in our witness.

We're not ever perfect at this following business, but it's a choice to make a commitment of the will and heart to put Jesus in charge of our lives. Growing as disciples is a life-long adventure. Meaningful discipleship, like effective listening, takes training, focus and discipline. That's why we come to worship, pray, study the Bible, and hang out with other Christians. As disciples we can find what we've always wanted, what we've always been looking for: unconditional love and forgiveness that will last a lifetime--even an eternity.

Listen.... Do you hear that?.... It's the soft sound of sandaled feet walking ahead. Follow him.... He asked me to remind you.

(Prayer)

This story of the calling of the first disciples reminds me of a favorite chorus we sang in YF many years ago. It's called "I Have Decided." Some of you may remember it, too. The words are written in your bulletin. Greg will play it through for us and then let's sing it together.