

Sunday: July 18, 2010

Scripture: Amos 8:1-12
Luke 10: 38-42

Sermon: Listening For God in an I-Pod World

Call to Worship: (anonymous)
Sing to the Lord, all the earth, Sing to the Lord!
Sing joyful songs that tell of God's greatness.
Sing to the Lord, all you peoples, Sing to the Lord!
Sing joyful songs that proclaim God's power.
Sing to the Lord, men of faith, Sing deeply of God's love.
(men) We sing with notes of grace and joy.
Sing to the Lord, women of faith, Sing sweetly of God's Grace.
(women) We sing in tones of heavenly harmony.
Sing Praise to God all who would follow the Christ
We sing of a Christ who gave everything for us.
Amen.
Amen

Hymns: #2061 Creator of Mountains
#2196 We Walk By Faith
#2222 The Servant Song

Prayer of Confession

Eternal God, you formed the created order with your Word. And you sent Your Word to us in the form of Jesus Christ, and in these latter days Your Word is declared to us through the power of the Holy Spirit. But we have not always heard. We have filled our ears and our hearts with messages that conflict with your love and justice. We have cluttered the air waves with songs that demean and disrupt your natural order. We have listened to those who would have us forget Your compassion for the lost and downtrodden. We seem to pay more attention to voices that call us away from Your Grace for all humankind. Forgive us, O God, and retune our ears so that we may hear You calling to us in no uncertain terms to love others as Christ loves us. For it is in Christ's name that we pray. Amen.

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The other day I was making the trip from home to Altavista. I like to time my 45 minute trip to get to the office close to 9:00am. Well, I had just turned onto Rt. 40 at Penhook and was getting my speed up to the minute a mile required to travel the 42 miles in 42 minutes when a small Honda pulled out in front of me. Oh, not right in front of me, but about a half mile down the road in front of me. So, I did not feel any alarm. I don't mind cars pulling out in front of me, if they will get up speed and go with the flow of the traffic. Which, in my case means about 60 mph. But it did not take long for me to realize that the Honda wasn't getting up to speed. I was bearing down fast on this tortoise, and if you've ever traveled Rt. 40 from Gretna to Rocky Mount, you know there are very few passing opportunities. I could feel the bristles on my neck begin to stand up as I slowed down my big old Dodge Ram so as not to rear end that Honda. And, finally, when a dotted line appeared with no oncoming traffic, I kicked that old diesel into passing gear and whipped around that pokey Honda. As I passed, I looked over, expecting to see a "little old lady" and what did I see? A young 20 something fellow with a set of ear phones and he was singing. Totally into his music and I'm not sure he even noticed me passing him. He was in a world of his own... he and his I-pod.

You've seen something similar to this, haven't you? Folks with their I-pods hooked to ear phones, totally into their music... walking down the school hallway amid several hundred other students, many of whom also have their ear phones on... totally into their music and oblivious to what is going on around them.

I've seen kids sitting in the bleachers watching a high school football game - cheerleaders shouting, band playing, fans yelling

and they are listening to the latest rap song, or some other current pop tune on their I-pods. I want to ask, why are they at the game!

I guess I will not be too surprised one Sunday when I step into the pulpit to preach the Word and look out to see folks sitting there with their ear phones on, bobbing their heads to the beat and their eyes spaced out as if they were in another world. The progression has been from radios and record players that everyone could hear and enjoy to personal recording devices that give the hearer a sense of aloneness as he or she grooves on his or her musical preference. This has been a movement from a community experience to a very ingrown and personal experience. I can only think of one thing that would be worse. Cars that have so many speakers that when the volume is turned up you can hear the beat two blocks before the car gets to you. One day a few years ago I was caught in a traffic jam under an underpass and the car next to us had his woofers so high that the windows and doors on our car were vibrating.

Now, I'm not against personal recording devices. They have their place, but they also have some drawbacks. When you are locked into the world of personal music, you are locked out of the world of community. You can be in the midst of hundreds and thousands, and still be alone. It's just me and my music.

It kind of reminds me of that passage from Luke. Martha was locked into her world. It was a world that was prescribed by social custom. Just like I-pods are the things to have and do in our age, being a good hostess was the thing to do in her time. Jesus was coming for dinner. Martha was consumed by the requirements of being a good hostess. She was in a world of her own, doing and working, preparing and serving. There was no time for sitting around and listening to the honored guest.

Sometimes we get this way in The Church. We design programs to keep us busy. We enlist new families to keep the programs going. We wear folks out with meetings and busy work. We hear of a need and immediately we ask, what can we do. We become like Martha, worried, anxious and distracted (one translation uses the word “Troubled”) because we feel and think that our only response to God is to get out there and “do” something. We substitute frantic action for personal relationships.

Martha did not own an I-pod. But her singlemindedness to the tasks of being a good hostess were just as consuming. Folks were coming into her home. The table was being set. Discussions were taking place. Words of wisdom were being poured out. Community was being built. And Martha was frantic to see that her guest was treated with respect and honor. And it blew her mind that her sister, Mary, did not feel the same things.

When she could take it no longer, she goes to Jesus and lodges a complaint against her sister. “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me.” Three times Martha uses me and my. You can tell where Martha’s focus is. Today we might say of someone like her. It’s AAM! All about Martha. She is in total distress that her sister has chosen to sit at Jesus’ feet and listen to all that is being said. And anyone of that day would know that this is not the place for a woman. She belonged in the Kitchen!

Martha wants Mary to be just as focused as she is, but not on the words of Jesus. She wants Mary to put on her I-pod earphones of social custom and proper female decorum, get up from the floor and take the load off her.

But Jesus responds: “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.”

Mary has chosen to listen. I could probably come up with ten good reasons why Mary made this choice. Let's try:

1. Mary was smitten by this man. He was rather ruggedly handsome.
2. Mary was tired of kitchen work while the men got to sit around and be served.
3. Mary sensed that Jesus wouldn't be around long and she wanted to learn much.
4. Mary had a real hunger to know what God had to say
5. Mary was angry at Martha and wanted to teach her a lesson.
6. Mary was making a statement for all women who wanted liberation from the kitchen, and the duties of being a hostess.
7. Mary was troubled and needed to find solace in Jesus' words
8. Mary felt that she could be as good a disciple as any of the men who followed Jesus.
9. Mary was worn out from bringing in the vegetables and needed to rest.
10. Mary was attempting to let Martha know that the attention should be given to the one that the meal honored, while Martha was drawing all the attention by attempting to be the good hostess.

But you know, it does not matter what Mary's reasons were. Jesus says she made the good choice. And this is not a put down of Martha. It is simply an acknowledgement on the part of Jesus that listening for God's word is the first step to acting. We are in the business of building community with Christ as the center figure. When we allow ourselves to become like Martha, anxious and upset over the proper setting for the knife, fork and spoon, and who gets the best cut of meat.... Then we have lost sight of the Word which God has sent to us.

Mary's actions shout loud and clear that we need to be in the business of listening for God's Word before we take action. When

the Session of this Church is presented with an opportunity to serve God's Kingdom, where do we start? My guess is we begin by looking at the budget,(we become distracted) then we look at the volunteers we will need,(we become anxious) and then we try to figure out how to get the project done with the least interruption to our regular program (we become troubled). Perhaps it is because, like Martha, we believe that it is all up to us. The emphasis is on us, and not on the Word which God has given to us that makes all things possible.

How different it would be in a Church if we could all set our I-pods aside, and spend some time asking the question: What would Christ have us do in this situation? What does God's Word say to us about this opportunity? What is the Spirit leading us to do in this matter?

Once we have come to an understanding of God's Leading, then I suspect that all the other things that could cause consternation would find a logical solution. Like Mary, we need to sit at the feet of Christ and listen. That is the better thing.

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