

2.06.22 –Epiphany 5, BWIM & Souper Bowl of Caring

“Listening with Heart and Mind”

The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

1 Peter 1:17-25 (NRSV) ~ Pam

¹⁷ If you invoke as Father the one who judges all people impartially according to their deeds, live in reverent fear during the time of your exile. ¹⁸ You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish. ²⁰ He was destined before the foundation of the world but was revealed at the end of the ages for your sake. ²¹ Through him you have come to trust in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are set on God.

²² Now that you have purified your souls by your obedience to the truth so that you have genuine mutual love, love one another deeply from the heart. ²³ You have been born anew, not of perishable but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God. ²⁴ For

“All flesh is like grass
and all its glory like the flower of grass.

The grass withers,
and the flower falls,

²⁵ but the word of the Lord endures forever.”

That word is the good news that was announced to you.

L: These are the Enduring Words of God! C: Thanks be to God.

James 1:17-21 (NIV) ~ Pam

¹⁷ Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. ¹⁸ He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of all he created.

Listening and Doing

¹⁹ My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, ²⁰ because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires. ²¹ Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.

L: These are instructive words of God! C: Thanks be to God.

Please pray with me:

Lord, our minds were full of worldly cares as we came to worship, pray, and sing together. By now, you are primary in our thoughts. Help us to feel your presence and hear your voice in the words spoken now. We ask you to open your word this morning to both our minds and hearts. Help us to live with holy intentions, listening for your direction. May those at home today feel your presence, assurance, and our love wherever they are. Lord, speak now through your messenger. “**Amen.**”

So, did you practice any silence last week? See if you can get up to a whole minute this week. No TV noise, just you and God. Let me know how that goes.

Thank you for bringing non-perishables for our Souper Bowl of Caring month. On my third anniversary here, I am grateful to be your Baptist Women in Ministry Preacher, not just today, but nearly every Sunday! There are many women mentioned in the Bible, who had a deep trust and relationship with God. Miriam, Sarah, Ruth, Naomi, Esther, Tamar, Deborah, Hanna, Mary, Elizabeth, Lydia, Priscilla, and Mary of Bethany. There are more, of course, but as a young woman, I did not hear about them other than the short passages with their names. Now, there are many books deeply researched and written about their strong faith and significance to the Kingdom. I appreciate that after 70+ years of hearing astute male voices in the pulpit, you have received my “heartfelt” teachings and testimonies with patience, trust, and grace.

Today, as we begin our study, Peter continues to guide the dispersed Christians into living holy as God calls them to do and adds a powerful reminder of the reason: Christ’s death on the cross. He encourages their obedience by explaining all motivations come from their new birth in Christ and how a compassionate love comes **to** them and endures through God’s word. Trusting God through Jesus produces the fruits of love. Normal life ages and withers yet the word of the Lord endures forever. That word **is** the good news of Christ’s saving grace.

We cannot just listen with our ears to God’s instructive words. We must learn to listen with our hearts and our renewed minds. Listen with spiritual transformation in mind. These verses define what it means to be

a Christian and one who is called to share Jesus with others. Deep listening can come from God's word plus silence. One example of a listening prayer format is called "Praying the Scriptures." Use the Psalms as your prayer script. Try it with me, Psalm 40:11. Repeat after me:

¹¹ Do not withhold / your mercy from me, Lord;
may your love and faithfulness / always protect me.

And if we fear the violence of our world, pray through Psalm 43:1-5:

¹ Vindicate me, my God,
and plead my cause
against an unfaithful nation.
Rescue me from those who are
deceitful and wicked.

As we observe communion today and remember Christ's body and blood broken and shed for our sins, we recall that even before creation, God was our redeemer. He loved us and created our physical beings. Jesus freed us by his own death and gave us eternal life by his Resurrection. This life is victory over earthly death if we believe in Christ. Silver and gold mean nothing compared to an eternity with Jesus. Mutual love is the fruit of eternal life here on earth; it is why we listen for how God wants us to share His love with others here before we die. Legacies for *show* are not what's required of disciples but giving to fulfill real world need is demanded of Christ's disciples - us.

"Every good and perfect gift is from above (James 1:17)" reminds us that our unchanging Creator God gives **every** gift: the spiritual gifts we studied in the Fall, physical gifts like those the Olympic athletes are currently demonstrating, and financial gifts from benevolent members and strangers. Likewise, our deeds or gifts to others must be motivated by

love, compassion, and God’s direction. Being able to discern our motivation is why listening to and receiving God’s Word is the key to spiritual growth and developing a stronger relationship with God.

“Be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to be angry (James 1:19b).” This formula will bring you to the righteous, holy life God desires. Verse 21 calls us to clean house, spiritually, that is, and perhaps physically too, to remove excess possessions bought in haste, vanity, or envy. Only by living simply and adopting the spiritual disciplines of silence and solitude can we absorb God’s saving Word through the Scriptures. The value of attending church is determined when the words heard are put into **action**. Before we move forward with hands and feet, we must open our hearts and minds to hear God’s Word clearly. If we are distracted as we read or pray, or are angry with someone who cut us off or forgot to signal on the way to church, how can we hear God’s voice over our own? How can we lead our church forward into service?

Do a heart check each morning – not your BP, but your LQ – your Love Quotient. Are you open to receive and to share God’s love and word today? Is your mind already set on a certain agenda for the day with no room for God’s *Kairos* moments? Or are you open to the direction of the Holy Spirit through your intuition? Are you listening for discernment or ideas that come to you unexpectedly? “I should call _____. Or let me find that commentary to better understand my devotional reading.” ***Being present*** -- present to the people around us and our responsibilities, yes. But, also, being present to the Lord in all we do or say. This is how we re-learn to invite people back to church. This is how you will hear the “still, small whisper” of God calling you to a new role in ministry. **Heart and**

mind insights will direct our hands and feet. One reason I am here is that I paused, listened, and obeyed. My life journey put God up on a shelf, in my mind only, as a back up first responder. But after spiritual and emotional healing, my heart burst open to answer God’s call into ministry, despite obstacles for women then and still today. I thank you Lord for prompting me to hear you, even if it did take a whiplash and rest to get my attention.

So, **how is your heart?** February is a perfect month to reassess your heart both physically and spiritually. How is the heart of our church, our community? It is still hurting but on the mend. In silence and by “Praying the Scriptures,” we invite God to reveal our work to us, both immediate and future needs we are uniquely able to fill. Will you experiment with a favorite Psalm? Here's how: Get your Bible and a prayer journal, tablet, or piece of paper. Get into your favorite prayer posture (a chair, bed, on your knees), have your Bible open to the verse. Read the first line, be silent, then read the next one, be silent. Read it again, silence, and again, silence. Listen for God’s voice in the words. Jot down anything that comes to mind. Read it one more time, then say Amen.

This is another tool to help us “Listen for the Work?” If we are living holy lives, our actions are motivated for others. // **Let us pray,** Dear Jesus, we thank you for simplifying our bold task of listening through your Word. Help us to trust your teaching and to discern your will. As we observe the Lord’s Supper, help us to feel your presence and instruction. Please keep us healthy and strong, so that we can continue to live out the Gospel and share it with others. In your name, we pray and abide, **Amen.**