

Pastor Roy's Sermon from March 3, 2013

Isaiah 55:1-9, Psalm 63:1-8, I Cor. 10:1-13, Luke 13:1-9

This can be a picture of the life of God--

When Someone Deeply Listens To You

When someone deeply listens to you
it is like holding out a dented cup
you've had since childhood
and watching it fill up with
cold, fresh water.

When it balances on top of the brim,
you are understood.

When it overflows and touches your skin,
you are loved.

When someone deeply listens to you
the room where you stay
starts a new life
and the place where you wrote
your first poem
begins to glow in your mind's eye.
It is as if gold has been discovered!

When someone deeply listens to you
your bare feet are on the earth
and a beloved land that seemed distant
is now at home within you.

— John Fox

In the spirit of this poem, Isaiah says—Turn, come, listen. Find life!

In an Everlasting Covenant!

The Sacred, the Holy is waiting.

God will not be trapped by our sometimes narrow images and assumptions.

An old man on a throne, frowning/scowling—
who weighs our thoughts and actions
against our hypocrisy and fear--
finding us wanting. . .lacking.

Or a disciplinarian waiting to seize upon our failures

Or one who enjoys testing us to see whether we are worth an occasional miracle
of answered prayer. . .or not.

No, here is the One who listens and loves.

Who understands our weakness, misunderstandings, wearied efforts of faithfulness.

Who invites us to take note of our fears,

to pay attention to our own violence.

perhaps an injury in the past which created a wound

which never stopped crying out for healing.

Isaiah and the prophets, and Jesus and his apostles cry out together, "LISTEN!"

We cannot afford to ignore this cry.

. . . But to probe our shadows takes courage, patience, and silence.

There are so many voices

of opinions and slants, trivia or advertising to sell
someone else's product or agenda.

At the end of the day, what do we do with it all?

have we had time to consider our own concerns

to cultivate a healing inner wisdom?

Have we had the courage--

taken the opportunity for stillness

to slow down—even for 10, 15, or 20 minutes?

To feel the inner loneliness which has been covered up
with responsibilities, noise, food, entertainment,
and stuff to buy?

Isaiah reminds us that the best stuff is the free stuff.

The stuff we cannot buy.

Rich promises

to take the place of empty promises

which litter. . . and pollute the land around us.

The Spirit offers us this free gift--

solitude for unpacking the anxiety, dread, irritability, and rage within us.

This loneliness is our companion whether we accept it or not.

If we become more aware of our loneliness—listen to it,

if we can become friends with solitude

finding in it not an overwhelming fear of abandonment,

but a stillness which invites us to be fully alive,

aware,

mindful of what's going on within and around us.

Can Lent be an opportunity to cultivate a practice of listening to the deeper voices?

There is a relationship between creation and the Spirit and you and me.

There is a unity at work among us—

the foundation is relationship--

but so often we live our lives as if we are separate

from creation, from the Spirit, from our neighbor.

This communion of deeper voices will thrive if we listen.

The good news is that these deeper voices are trustworthy.

Unlike the collective, anxious greed which surrounds us otherwise.
Isaiah perhaps had that anxiety and fear in mind he speaks for God,
“My thoughts are not your thoughts—your ways are not my ways.”

Listen! Commune with the Spirit of God—*now*--when and where God is found.
God is not found yesterday or tomorrow.
God need not be found somewhere else.
God is here. God is now.
Wherever and whenever we are.

Lent is a reminder that satisfaction comes not from the things around us,
not from what happens to us
or the freedom we have to do what we want when we want,
but satisfaction is inward.
The gift of the Spirit
to live in communion with creation and God's children all around us.
When we are deaf to God's still voice of love,
this communion is broken.

Isaiah calls us to return.
To wait in the presence of God who listens intently with a love and mercy so strong
that it transforms us.
Those who return will find mercy—every single time.

Here is One who gives free mercy—just because.

We open ourselves to the richness of this mercy when we turn
because we have been listening
and we know we need help.

Those who understand that they cannot pull it off on their own,
are unable to get it right this time or any time in the future. . .
Ahh, these are the ones who are open to mercy.

As Jesus suggests in today's parable, God is patient and
today is the day to seek the God who listens and cares.
For God wants us to flourish.

[By the way, I am here to listen to your stories of loneliness, confusion, fear, as well as courage and strength. All of these are part of our faith journey. Nothing I do is more important than this. If you wish to talk, I wish to listen.

So, let us make room for God's mercy in stillness.
Let us push back the voices which proclaim a cheapened version of the life God has granted us.
And instead, let us listen to the deeper voices
in the Scriptures, in creation, in God's children all around us.

God's mercy waits. God's mercy listens. Amen.