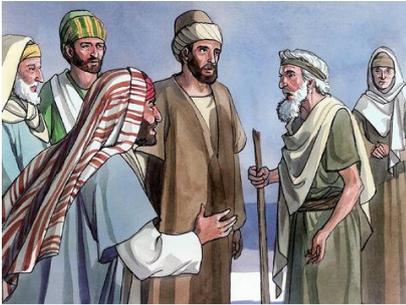




Wey Valley Methodist Circuit – Pastoral Letter 5 May 2021 Rev Barrie Tabraham

“Hearing and Listening” (John 9 : 24 – 31)



²⁴ So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, “Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner.” ²⁵ He answered, “I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.” ²⁶ They said to him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?” ²⁷ He answered them, “I have told you already, and **you would not listen**. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?” ²⁸ Then they reviled him, saying, “You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. ²⁹ We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.” ³⁰ The man answered, “Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. ³¹ We know that God does not listen to sinners, but **he does listen to one who worships him** and obeys his will.”

During Rev Keith Beckingham’s absence on sabbatical, we are ‘filling-in’, as it were, and my two contributions are both on the story of the healing of the blind man in Chapter 9 of John’s Gospel. It’s fascinating for a number of reasons – the first being that, though the account is about sight (which I will write about next time), it’s also about **hearing and listening**. I was prompted to write about this subject by two recent events.

First, one of my friends pointed out that, because he wore glasses and had a hearing aid behind each ear, he found it difficult to wear a face mask as well, but said that the last thing he wanted to lose was his hearing! Then secondly, the other day I passed a blind man walking along with a white stick. Nothing unusual about that, you might think, except that this man’s face was wreathed in a most wonderful smile. And I couldn’t help but wonder, what was he thinking about? – and, knowing that blind people often have an acute sense of hearing – I wondered what *sounds* he was hearing?

It’s worth thinking for a moment about the experience of the blind man in John’s Gospel of coming into faith, and trying to apply that to our own relationship with God and the way in which we *hear* his voice and listen to him.

Hearing and listening play a very important part in any Christian’s journey of discipleship. Remember the blind man’s comment to the Pharisees, “*I have told you already, and you would not listen . . .*”? That’s how the New Revised Standard Version translates the blind man’s reply. The REB has him saying, “*I have told you already, but you took no notice.*” The word in Greek means to hear, but it can also mean “to understand”, and in fact, some of the first translators tried to bring out the deeper meaning of this story by writing in the early manuscripts, ‘**believe**’ rather than ‘**listen**’. Some versions actually omitted the negative entirely, which made that verse read, “*I told you and you heard me*” – in the same way that we might say, “You heard me!”

To pray, to be a faithful disciple of Christ is to listen to his voice. That is what obedience is all about. As you probably know, the word 'obedience' comes from the Latin word **ob-audire** = to listen with great attentiveness. Without listening, we become 'deaf' to the voice of love. The Latin word for 'deaf' is **surdus**. To be completely deaf is to be **ab-surdus**. Yes – '**absurd**'!! When we no longer pray, when we stop listening to the voice of love which speaks to us, then our lives become absurd lives. As individuals our priorities become distorted, our motivations suspect. As a Church, unless we listen to the prompting of God's Spirit, our best-laid plans can soon come to nothing, and our efforts appear 'absurd'.

But when we pay attention to God, and listen to his voice, we are placing his will at the centre of what we do, then we shall find that we become his obedient servants – not out of a sense of duty, nor through sheer 'muscular' effort, but because pleasing him becomes our delight – second nature.

For us to pray: Loving God, help us as individuals, as churches, as a circuit, to be listening communities. Give us grace, patience, and humour to hear and consider the points of view that others bring forward – even though we may not immediately agree with them. But above all, help us to listen to the promptings of your divine Spirit, that we may be informed by your wisdom, and led in the ways of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. **Amen.**
