

LUKE 9:28-36
ST JOHN'S, 7.2.16, 9.30 am

INTRODUCTION: LISTENING

“Are you sitting comfortably? Then I'll begin.” When I was a child, that was my cue to listen avidly to a story on the radio. *Listen with Mother* may seem very old-fashioned now, but it's not very long ago that Nathan and Joel were still enjoying listening to stories on CDs and tapes. I find it very hard to do that: I tune out, my mind drifts onto other things, or I go to sleep. It can be very hard to listen attentively, even when we intend to, whether we're listening to a story, a sermon, or to someone who needs to talk and is using us as a 'listening ear'.

But how we listen to people also depends on who we're listening to, and on what they're talking about. Most of the time, I listen to my children, because they're important to me. But there are people to whom I find it very hard to listen, because they never seem to have anything interesting to say!

At the end of the story we heard this morning from Luke's Gospel, God the Father tells Jesus' disciples, *“This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him!”* I believe that the command, *“Listen to him!”* still applies to those of us who are Jesus' disciples today. But we need to know to whom we're listening; we need to know Jesus as our King, we need to know Jesus as the Suffering Servant; and we need to know Jesus as the great Prophet. Let's think about what all that means.

. . . TO JESUS AS KING ('MY SON')

God the Father calls Jesus *my Son*. We need to remember that in the OT, especially in some of the Psalms, it's the king who's called God's son. Eg Psalm 2:7: *I will proclaim the decree of the LORD: He said to me, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father"*.

If you or I were fortunate enough – or unfortunate enough! - to meet the Queen, we'd probably listen very carefully to anything she had to say to us. If she commanded us to do something, we'd make sure we did it. Whether or not we think this country should have a Queen, we are her subjects, and she has the right to expect obedience from us. If she chose instead to listen to us, and to comfort or encourage us, we'd feel that it was an amazing privilege that she took the time and trouble to do that. And even if we disagreed with every word she said, we'd never forget it!

You and I are fortunate enough to have the opportunity to meet with the King of the universe every day of our lives. The centre of the Christian faith is a relationship with Jesus Christ. We meet with him as we read Scripture, as we pray, and as we meet with other Christian believers. As we meet him, there are times when he tells us what to do; when that happens, we should obey him gladly. After all, whereas most of us have no choice about the fact that we're British and that this country is ruled by the Queen, those of us who are believers have chosen to become citizens of Christ's kingdom, we've chosen to allow him to rule over our lives. Once we've made that choice, it's our duty

and our joy to listen when he tells us what to do, to make sure we've understood what he means, and then to go and do it.

At other times Jesus listens to us, and gives us comfort and encouragement. If the Queen chose to do that, we'd think it was an amazing privilege. It's an even more amazing privilege that the King of the universe frequently chooses to listen to *us*! In fact, in the OT, God gave wealth and power to the king, so that the king could provide for the needs of his people, and protect them from their enemies. Lots of the OT kings abused their wealth and power. But Jesus is the ideal King. His wealth and power are entirely at our disposal. When he does command us to do something, it's for our own good; and he's always ready to listen to us, to provide for all our needs, and to protect us from our enemies.

So, as you read your Bible, as you pray, as you meet with other believers – in fact, whatever you're doing, make sure you're listening for Jesus' voice. Allow him to comfort you when things go wrong, allow him to give you encouragement, and listen to his commands and then obey them. Remember: he's your king, and you're his subject.

. . . TO JESUS AS SUFFERING SERVANT ('CHOSEN')

God the Father calls Jesus *my Son, whom I have chosen*. There are a number of individuals in the OT (such as Moses and Elijah) whom God says he's 'chosen'. But above all it's the whole people of Israel whom he's chosen. And in the book of Isaiah, both the people of Israel as a whole, and Messiah in particular, are pictured again and again as the

Suffering Servant. This figure in Isaiah is pictured as someone whose service for the Lord leads him to suffer and to die.

Coming back to today's passage, we heard how Jesus met with Moses and Elijah on the top of a mountain. They *talked . . . about the way in which he would soon fulfil God's purpose by dying in Jerusalem*.

Linking this with some of the passages in the book of Isaiah, in which he describes the way in which the servant would suffer, we can understand that Jesus was *chosen* to die on a cross, to rise to life, and to ascend into heaven.

So, when we listen to Jesus, we're listening to someone who has suffered himself. When we need help or encouragement, the people who give us the best advice and help are people who've experienced suffering themselves, people who know first-hand what it feels like. People who've suffered themselves don't just offer us platitudes, or tell us not to get upset. They listen; and when they do speak, they speak from experience. When we take our problems, our struggles, and our sadness to Jesus, we're taking them to someone who really knows and understands what we're going through, someone who can and will speak into our situation in a way that will really help.

Jesus is the suffering servant, who can comfort us in our sufferings, because he himself has suffered. Listen to him!

. . . TO JESUS AS THE GREAT PROPHET ('LISTEN TO HIM')

God the Father calls us, as Jesus' disciples, to *listen to him*. This instruction echoes Deuteronomy 18:15, where Moses tells the people of Israel: *The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him.* Jesus is this Prophet to whom Moses looked forward. So we're to listen to Jesus as the great prophet, the one who can apply God's word to our hearts, our minds and our lives. To listen to Jesus is to listen to God himself, as he calls us, inspires us, teaches us, informs us, advises us, persuades us, urges us, warns us, challenges us, commands us, corrects us, disciplines us, nurtures us, builds us up, reassures us, affirms us, comforts us, and encourages us. He knows just what we need at any particular time, and if we listen to him, we will hear him speak.

CONCLUSION

If you've listened to all that I've been saying, you may well be thinking, 'That's all very well, but *how* do I listen to Jesus?' After all, he's not here in flesh and blood any more. We can't listen to him in the same way that we listen to other people we know.

There are three main ways Jesus speaks to us today. So, if you want to hear the Lord God speak to you, not just today, but every day, there are three things you need to do on a regular basis.

The first is to read the Bible. If we don't know God's word, which he's given us in written form, how can we possibly know when he's

speaking to us in other ways? Jesus will speak to us as we read his Word, usually in a general sense, about how to live our lives. If we want to hear Jesus speak to us, we need to read the Bible, regularly and systematically.

The second thing to do on a regular basis, if you want to hear the Lord God speak to you, is to pray. Talk to Jesus about your needs, your desires, your life. Prayer is vital, because as we pray, we invite the Lord to speak to us.

The third thing to do on a regular basis, if you want to hear the Lord God speak to you is to meet with Christian believers – in other words, come to Church! The Lord can speak to us more easily through other people who are open to what he's saying to them. He might even speak to us through the sermon!!

As we listen to Jesus, the King of the universe, the Suffering Servant, the great Prophet, as we hear what he has to say to us, and as we put that into practice in our lives, we ourselves will be transformed more and more into his likeness, and the world around us will be transformed as the Holy Spirit is able to work through us. So let's ask the Lord to keep our spiritual ears open to listen to all he has to say to us: _