



St Andrew's



United Reformed Church
Penylan Road, Roath, Cardiff. CF24 3PF

26th February 2022

Weekly newsletter - issue 103

Dear friends,

There are a lot of reasons to be afraid right now: we still have the Covid-19 pandemic, a plummeting economy, job losses, the threat of a war between Russia and Ukraine, etc., etc. And yet, God's Word says, **"do not be afraid"** more times than any other command in the Bible. It appears from news report that many people across the world are trying to talk to the Russian leader, but he does not appear to be listening.

In the letter of James 1:19, in the New Testament, God's word teaches that we are to be slow to speak and quick to listen. Sadly, many of us, perhaps most of us, are quick to speak and slow to listen. We are not good listeners, and the problem is that most of us think we are!

I read somewhere of a definition of listening: ***It is when two people are talking and the first one stops to draw breath —that one is called "the listener"! Unfortunately, that is often how we listen.***

Dietrich Bonhoeffer brings an alternative approach. In writing about the Christian and listening in his book "***Life Together***", he tells us,

"The first service one owes to others in the community involves listening to them. Just as our love for God begins with listening to God's word, the beginning of love for other Christians is learning to listen to them. God's love for us is shown by the fact that God not only gives us God's word, but also lends us God's ear. We do God's work for our brothers and sisters when we learn to listen to them. So often Christians, especially preachers, think that their only service is always to have to 'offer' something when they are together with other people. They forget that listening can be a greater service than speaking. Many people seek a sympathetic ear and do not find it among Christians, because these Christians are talking even when they should be listening."

Theologian Hugh Mackay writes that when we listen, it is an act of generosity.

"When we listen, we are being remarkably generous: we are offering the other person the gift of understanding; the gift of acceptance (even if not agreement); the gift of taking that other person seriously."

So how can we be better listeners? There are some basic skills that we can use: non-verbal listening skills such as eye contact, smiling, nodding, leaning forward slightly, perhaps even not having our mobile phones in the vicinity!

We can also show we are listening using techniques like reflective listening and asking a few fact-finding questions.

The bottom line in all that we are doing in the ministry of pastoral care, whatever our context, is to love the people the Lord has given us. This springs from the exhortations as well as the model given to us in Scripture. Jesus teaches his disciples that they should love each other as he has loved them (John 13:34), Paul prays ***"that your love (love for God, love for others) may abound more and more"*** (Philippians 1:9–11) and Peter writes "love one another deeply, from the heart" (1 Peter 1:22).

To end we cite Bonhoeffer again,

"Christians have forgotten that the ministry of listening has been committed to them by him who is himself the great listener and whose work they should share. We should listen with the ears of God that we may speak the Word of God."

NEWS

It is great sadness that we heard of the passing of our dear friend and member Mrs Agnes Nurse. Well over one hundred years old, Agnes has always been a faithful member of St Andrew's, even though she has not been able to attend over the past years due to being almost completely blind. However, she avidly received and enjoyed our weekly newsletter. For a number of years Agnes has been cared for by the staff in the Thomas Court complex and her dear friend Mrs Joan Boon, who has constantly taken care of her needs. We have just received confirmation that a service of thanksgiving for Agnes' life will be held at the Briwnant Chapel, Thornhill Crematorium on Wednesday 16th March 2022, commencing at 12.00 noon.

As I am writing this newsletter, we are hearing of the atrocities that are occurring with the Russian invasion of the peaceful country of Ukraine. It is at times like these that we feel so helpless, being so far away. We can however help by praying to God that He will help all those who are facing bombing, artillery fire and other forms of attacks at this time. It is only God that is able to bring peace in troubled times and we pray that those who are causing the trauma will be made to understand the hurt that it is causing.

Finally, a reminder that the funeral of Miss Pam Ward will be held at St Andrew's on Wednesday 2nd March 2022, commencing at 12.00 noon. The service of thanksgiving for Pam's life will be followed by comital at Thornhill cemetery at 1.30pm.

We have provided our weekly '**Thoughts and Prayers**' video, which, as always, can be found by holding down the Ctrl button and clicking

on the YouTube link: <https://youtu.be/NIAvG8kgt5E>. The video is also available on St Andrew's, and my Facebook pages.

May God bless and keep you all safe.

Des

Minister - St Andrew's URC Cardiff and Penuel Nelson

SERMON

Exodus 34:29-35;

2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2;

Luke 9:28-43

In the coming week, churches around the world will undergo a transformation of sorts, as the church calendar moves from the season after Epiphany to the season of Lent. Our praise-filled shouts of "**Alleluia!**" will give way to Lent's solemn petition, "**Lord have mercy.**" During the season of Lent many churches will retire their finest brass and festive hangings in favour of simpler and more contemplative fixtures. And the lectionary will lead us down from the mountaintop where the transfigured Christ is revealed in glory, through the valley of the shadow of death, and ultimately to Jerusalem where the cross and tomb await.

As a season, Lent weighs heavily on us. It urges us to recall the suffering and death of our Lord. So, in many ways, we arrive at this final Sunday before Lent with a mixture of anticipation and anxiety, a combination of joy and dread. It is no accident, then, that every year on this Sunday, we hear again the story of Christ's transfiguration on the mountaintop because, at the heart of this story, we find these all-too-familiar feelings: **anticipation diluted by anxiety** and **joy thinned by dread.**

Luke's Gospel tells us that Jesus summons Peter, James, and John to the mountaintop. Without getting our contextual bearings, we may be tempted to believe that the chosen disciples happily agreed and gleefully followed Jesus without reservation. However, we were told that just a few verses earlier in chapter 9, Jesus tells the disciples that he must **'undergo great suffering, be rejected, killed, and then rise from the dead.'**

"If any want to become my followers," Jesus also says, **"let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it."** As Peter, James, and John journey with Jesus to the mountaintop, they are forced to come to grips with the horrifying truth that Jesus, their beloved friend and leader, must suffer and die!

When they reach the top of the mountain, the Gospel tells us that Jesus was transfigured before them, and Moses and Elijah appeared. As the disciples beheld their Lord, they realised that they were in the very presence of God. But even in this incredible moment of divine transfiguration, Peter could not forget what Jesus had told them before they came to the mountain. **"Master, it is good for us to be here," Peter petitions, "Let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."**

On some level, most of us can't help but sympathise with Peter. Who among us would knowingly submit our self or our loved ones to pain and suffering? Peter's efforts to protect Jesus are undoubtedly acts of love and devotion – but they are also acts couched in Peter and the disciples' need for safety and security. They had seen a glimpse of

God's glory in the face of Jesus, and they wanted desperately to hold onto it, to protect it.

But the moment that Peter gets into cahoots with James and John to try and hold onto and protect Jesus, is the moment that a voice from above breaks in, once again proclaiming: **"This is my Son, my chosen; listen to him!"**

But notice what happens next: As the disciples came down from the mountaintop, they didn't rush into the closest town and tell the first person they saw about what they had just witnessed. They didn't wait until Jesus wasn't looking to talk about it. And they didn't take to Social Media with the news. Luke's Gospel tells us that they **"told no one any of the things they had seen."**

Although most biblical scholars interpret the disciples' silence as a mark of fear over what they had seen and heard — which is certainly a plausible explanation — perhaps there's more than one dimension here. What if the disciples' silence allowed them to be obedient to God's command?

The disciples had heard God say, **"This is my Son, my chosen; listen to him!"** So instead of running and telling the world what they had seen on the mountain, what if they chose instead to obey; to be silent so they could listen?

In a world bustling with noise, pandemic, threat of war and chaos, where words and rhetoric are shouted with impunity, stirring up fear and angst, perhaps this is the word from the Lord that we need to hear.

Amidst all of the joys and heartbreaks of the world; in the face of all of the delight and despair that surrounds us; and despite all of the things we know and can never know, God beckons us, ever so gently: **Listen**. Imagine for a moment, what the world might look like if we listened — not in preparation to respond, but in order to understand.

What might our politics look like if we listened more and argued less? What might our schools look like if we taught our children how to listen as intently and deliberately as we taught them how to speak and to write? And what might our churches look like if we listened intently for the voice of God from those who differ from us?

In his book, ***Bread for the Journey***, the Catholic priest and theologian Henri J.M. Nouwen writes:

"To listen is very hard, because it asks of us so much interior stability that we no longer need to prove ourselves by speeches, arguments, statements, or declarations. True listeners no longer have an inner need to make their presence known. They are free to receive, to welcome, to accept. The beauty of listening is that those who are listened to start feeling accepted, start taking their words more seriously and discovering their own true selves. Listening is a form of spiritual hospitality by which you invite strangers to become friends, to get to know their inner selves more fully, and even to dare to be silent with you."

As our Lenten journey approaches, and the chaos of the world presses in with voices of despair clanging in our ears, may we remember how

to listen. For it is in listening that we truly hear one another.

And it is in listening that we hear the voice of God.

Amen.

PRAYERS

Heavenly Father, let us remember that the star that led the Magi to the stable announced to the world that its Saviour was born. Today we live in a world that is still covered by darkness, and still needing to make that journey to the stable door. May our lives reflect your light day by day, as we seek to serve where you have placed us. That we might be the means through which others can encounter Jesus Christ.

We are drawn to your feet in worship, Your creation facing its creator, hearts laid bare by your light, and humbly asking for your mercy. We come to you Father God as a people in need of assurance and forgiveness. We come to you as a people in need of healing and wholeness.

We come dependent upon your love. Draw us close. Enfold us in your arms. Fill us with your Spirit that we might reflect your light within this dark world, speak your Word with boldness and draw others to your feet.

Father God, as we join together in worship let us not forget your infinite patience and love in dealing with your people, of which we count ourselves. Use us in your service, that we might draw others into your kingdom. In our worship let us remember that the love of God for his people and for his church knows no limits. The Psalmist talks of God's love reaching up to the heavens and his justice to the

depth of the ocean, and yet he blesses us as individuals with the gifts of his Spirit so that his Church, his people might be a light in this place, to his glory.

Almighty and most merciful Father, we have often erred and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep. We have too often followed the devices and desires of our own hearts. We have offended against thy holy laws. We have left undone those things which we ought to have done, and we have done those things which we ought not to have done; and there is no health in us. But we ask that you, O Lord, will have mercy upon us, miserable offenders and spare those O God, who confess their faults. Restore those who are penitent; according to your promises declared to mankind in Christ Jesu our Lord. And grant, O most merciful Father, for his sake, that we may hereafter live a godly, righteous, and sober life, to the glory of your holy Name.

Almighty Father, whose great love to men and women gave your dearly beloved Son to die for us; grant that through his cross our sins may be put away, and remembered no more against us, and that, cleansed by his Blood, and mindful of his sufferings, we may take up our cross daily, and follow him in newness of life, until we come to his everlasting kingdom.

God of infinite mercy and goodness, with grateful hearts we pray to you today for Peace. You offer us your peace continually and constantly remind us that peacemakers are blessed, **"for they shall be called children of God."** May your voice resound in the hearts of all, as you call us to follow the path of reconciliation and peace, and to be merciful as you are merciful.

We pray to you for the people of the Ukraine who are experiencing conflicts and deaths. Bless the leaders with wisdom, vision and perseverance needed to build together a world of justice and solidarity, and to break down walls of hostility and division.

To you we entrust all families and pray that they may never yield to discouragement and despair but become heralds of new hope to one another in this challenging time.

May you continue to inspire all of us to oneness of heart and mind, to work generously for the common good, to respect the dignity of every person and the fundamental rights which have their origin in the image and likeness of God impressed upon every human being.

Grant eternal rest to the dead and quick recovery to the wounded, we pray through Christ our Lord.

Everlasting God, send us out into the world, renewed by our worship and strengthened by our fellowship, so that we may be a witness to the Gospel of your son Jesus Christ and bring healing and reconciliation to our wounded world.

Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Risen Saviour Jesus Christ.

Amen.