

“Listen to My Voice”
Living the Resurrection – part #4

1 John 3:11-24

[1] Good morning, friends. I am so glad you have chosen today to spend time with us as we reflect on God’s Word. Turn to your neighbor and tell them, “God needs you to be the church.” If we are to listen to God’s voice and make a difference in this world, it will take all of us, working together. You are here for a reason. God has a purpose for you. Let us expect that God will change our hearts today, in light of the love God has shown us in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Would you join me in prayer? I encourage you to pray with your hands extended, showing God you are ready to receive whatever he has for you today.

Lord Jesus, teach us this morning how you would have us live and love. Your sacrifice for us proves God’s love toward us, and it shows us that we are saved for a reason – to go and show that same love to the world. Help us to lay down our lives for the kingdom of heaven. In our worship today, may we become disciples who listen and obey, calling all to a loving relationship with you, and serving the world the way you taught us. Help us to be your church, O Lord. Amen.

[2] Since Easter we have been reflecting on the meaning of the Resurrection. How do we show in our daily lives that Jesus is alive? We’ve talked about letting Christ roll away the stones of sin and suffering in our lives. We’ve discussed how hard it is for some to believe Christ is alive, as evidenced by the disciple Thomas’s initial reluctance. Last week we talked about being witnesses of Christ, following the examples of the first disciples, who went from hiding in fear, to publicly proclaiming the Resurrection, even if they died for it. Today we reflect on this simple truth: “Living the Resurrection” means we need to listen to God’s voice.

[3] People may not be the best listeners in the world, but radio antennas sure are. They can hear signals from hundreds of miles away. Since I moved to Houghton, I’ve been trying to tune in my car radio to my favorite station in Marquette. Does anyone remember trying to fine tune an analog radio dial to get

the best signal? Now my digital radio can hone in on the exact frequency I ask. The evolution of radio antennas is incredible. Today the Deep Space Network that can hear a Martian land-rover over 100 million miles away and the New Horizons spacecraft, which is now over 4 billion miles from Earth. That’s what I call a good listener!

How good are you at listening? Some of us can hear bacon frying at 100 paces. Personally, I can hear ice cream melting with my eyes closed. But then, I also seem to have difficulty hearing my wife across the living room. And if our children are asking us for dessert, strangely, it’s like I’m almost deaf. Listening is definitely a skill we all can work on.

Would you agree with me that in our world today, we have a problem with listening to each other? We are too eager to talk and too slow to listen. There is also the problem that while we may hear what someone is saying, we don’t take the time to understand what we are hearing. That is the truth about listening – active listening shows a response.

God is a lot closer than Mars, closer than our hearts in fact, and yet, how good are we at listening to God’s voice today? Are we even listening? Do we respond? As followers of the Resurrected Lord, I think we should.

[4] The Apostle John has a lot to say about listening to God. 1st John 3:11 starts out with this simple fact: “For this is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another.” As it turns out, the Beatles were not the first to coin the term, “All we need is love.” John says, we have known this all along. What kind of love do we need, though? I love pizza, but that kind of love won’t change the world. With all the hurt and unrest today, we would rather know a love that makes a difference, a love that results from listening to God.

[5] It is interesting that John uses Cain and Abel as his first example. If you don’t know the story, you can read it in Genesis 4. Cain was angry with his brother, and God spoke to Cain.

Then the Lord said to Cain, “Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it.” (Genesis 4:6, NIV)

God spoke to Cain, but Cain didn't listen. Instead, Cain murdered his brother. I find this pattern repeats itself in the world today. People become jealous and angry, they don't take the time to listen to each other, and sadly, people die as a result. Even if a literal life isn't taken, the cost is high when we ignore other voices, especially God's voice. People become depressed, addicted, lost. Spouses stop loving with each other. Children are abused and neglected. I believe the greatest cause of all social problems is a lack of effective listening.

[6] At other times, the problem is that we listen to the wrong voice. We listen to the voice of doubt, ridicule, and fear. We listen to the voices in the world who mock, bully and hate. When we listen to those voices instead of God's voice, we lose a little of ourselves, our spirit, our enthusiasm, and our character.

[7] God says, “Tune them out. Adjust your dial. Listen to me.” The Bible is filled with message God speaks to us, commanding us to listen and to love. Here are just a few.

[8] *Matthew 22:37-39 (NIV) - “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’”*

[9] *John 13:34 (NIV) – “A new commandment I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so also you must love one another.”*

[10] *Hebrews 3:15 (ESV) - “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts...”*

Jeremiah 33:3 (NKJV) – “Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know.”

[11] It is interesting that when teaching in parables, Jesus repeated the phrase, “Whoever has ears, let them hear.” (Matthew 11:15, 13:9, 13:43, Mark 4:9, 4:23, Luke 8:8, 14:35) We all have ears, yet it is not clear we have all chosen to listen. Hopefully, you have chosen to listen to me right now! We all have the inherent ability to listen to God. The question remains: in our listening, do we obey? Are we tuned in to God?

John says that listening to God means choosing love over hate, generosity over greed. Let's read this passage again.

[12] This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person?

[13] Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth. (1 John 3:16-18)

First off, listening to God's voice is the way we know we are loved. God's love speaks to us from the cross. Because Jesus laid down his life freely for us, we know we are loved. And when we hear about that love, John says, we are motivated to love others with the same spirit. "Agape" - the biblical word for love - means a self-giving, self-sacrificing, others-first kind of love. John doesn't mince any words. If you do not take care of your brothers and sisters in this world, you are neither listening to God or nor being loving.

Love cannot just consist of words; it must be shown in action and in truth. (v.18) I was not surprised to find that "Love in Action" is a common name for many non-profits in our country. It appears that many Christians have read God's Word, heard God's voice, and decided to act in tangible ways to show God's love.

[14] What about us? There are so many obstacles to listening to God's voice and being more loving. We have to let go of our pride and our self-righteousness. We have to resist comparing our actions with others, trying to play the game of "At least I'm better than so-and-so." We have to resist fatigue and impatience. Frankly, God never stops loving us; therefore, we should never stop loving others.

Well, so what? Let's say you do want to listen to God's voice, you do want to obey, love, and serve. I think most of us listening are tuned in. So what do we resolve to do? We may all believe this message, but the real test comes when we leave this building and return to our daily lives. Will there be anything different about us that tells the world we love them? What about how we give to others and to God's church? What about the way we use social media? What about the words we speak? How will all of our actions affect the people with whom we spend our time?

[15] Listening to God's voice is sort of like getting a driver's license. Two of my children are starting to drive. Pray for us! Here is how it works: They go to a class, get some instruction, and take a paper test. If they pass, they can drive a car. But talking about driving is totally different from getting into an actual car, turning the key and pressing the gas pedal.

That is the way it is with listening to God's voice. Hearing God's word today is the class. Actually putting into practice what God says is driving the car.

[16] All of us need to ask ourselves, how have we tuned our antennas? Whose voice are we listening to? When we watch television, YouTube, Netflix, etc., what are we processing? What influence does it have on us? Smile.FM is a bit out of range here in Houghton, except high on some hills when you have a good antenna. Still, I love their promise. "Listen only to Smile.FM for thirty days, and see how it changes your heart, mind and attitude."

We need to tune into God's voice. A pastor once asked, "Do you want to hear God's voice audibly? Then read the Bible out loud."¹ Friends, I challenge you to listen to God's voice, to read the bible out loud, to reflect, and then to put what you learn into action. It does the world no good for us to merely sit here and listen to a sermon, to listen to some songs and some scriptures and think that we have obeyed God. Each and every one of us is called to Live the Resurrection in our daily lives, to hear God's voice and to respond. Let us respond together, so that the world can truly see the love of God in our actions.

Memory verse: 1 John 3:18

"Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action."

Reflection Questions:

1. How good of a listener are you? How do you show you that listen?
2. How well can you hear God's voice? Do you wish you could hear him more clearly?
3. According to 1 John 3, how do we prove we are listening to God? What actions should we take?
4. Do you do these things?
5. Stop and ask God right now what he is asking you to do. Will you do it?

¹ Sandy Robertson, at 2018 clergy retreat in Boyne Falls, MI.