

Your Voice, God's Voice ... Who's Winning?

Reflection on Mark 6: 1-6

First Congregational church, Westfield

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The indirect but powerful message in this little piece of Scripture is as relevant today as ever. We turn our thoughts this morning to how the people who knew Jesus as a young boy listened to him, and how we listen to one another.

I know you may not believe me. But how we listen to each other can actually determine how we shine (or don't shine), how well we perform, and the kind of community, church and world we create, along with God. How we listen determines the quality and outcome of all of our relationships.

Think about your friend (your enemy), someone you think you know very well. Your child, your parent, your spouse, your neighbor. Someone whose actions and very words you might know before they do or say them. *They are this way*. Consider they are this way because of the voice in your head about them. Your listening of *who they are and how they are* is the space they show up in. So it was for Jesus, so it is with everyone.

First of all, let's acknowledge and unpack just a little what I'm calling today the voice in your head. The voice in your head has all kinds of notions. It's got gazillions of opinions, it's got good and bad experiences in the past, many clashing beliefs and fears, as well as hopes and dreams. It's got a lot of "unfinished business," so to speak. It's noisy in there. When we see certain people, especially, it has an "expert" opinion of that person, and typically, it can't be moved. It will not change. Regardless of the effort one may put in to change another's listening of them. (And it can be exhausting, believe me.) And so, we see this person(s) through a kind of filter, regardless of how they may have changed or grown. A person cannot "show up" for you any differently than your fixed perception of him or her. It will interpret every move they make through that filter. Think of colored glasses. It doesn't matter how this person moves or what they say, the glasses through which you see them is determinative. Jesus knew this and addressed it when he later told them to "shake off the dust" as they left those who listened to him and saw them through these filters. Shaking off the dust means to intentionally continue to be who you are, not letting the listening, the lack of faith, the harsh disbelief and sometimes cruel assessments throw you off your game. Jesus knew about the voice in people's heads. But thank God, he knew about God's voice even more. With Jesus, God's voice won. How about with us?

So it was with Jesus in his hometown of Nazareth. Before they recognized him, they were amazed at his wisdom, his miracles. Then someone said, "Why that's ol' Joseph's son, the carpenter. We know who he is!" Then it was, "Fuggetaboutit!" There was no way that Jesus could make any inroads on their thinking (or listening) of him. This is why I say that willingness is the first step in any change anyone may want to make in his or her life. They were not willing

to listen Jesus (give up any of their fixed perceptions) in any other way, except the way they knew him as a child. This, my friends, is why no spiritual growth, let alone any miracles can happen with us, unless and until we are just a little bit willing, a little bit open, a little bit okay with not knowing, even to be wrong about someone or something.

Think about the times when you have felt seen and heard as someone unique, worthy, respected and admired. You are more articulate, effective, confident and relaxed. On the other hand, when you feel judged and ignored, disrespected or criticized, you begin to behave accordingly. You are not Fred Astaire; you are Clem Kadiddlehopper. You are not Audrey Hepburn; you are Edith Bunker. This is if you are visible at all.

A mother should know that the way she listens to her child makes a big difference in how confident and happy that child is. Imagine a mother saying something like, "You again!" when you walk into the room. It's not only hurtful in the moment, it's damaging for life, if it happens too often.

Whole groups of people have been listened to in this way in our culture. Historically and to this day people are striving to be heard in a way that validates their humanity, their worth, and their dignity. Older people strive to be seen and heard, as caregivers, society, even their own children begin to listen to them in ways that are predictable and far less than respectful, let alone in ways that are open and honoring.

This is a discipline. This is a spiritual practice. This is the lesson of the Savior.

Jesus provided this kind of listening for the downtrodden, the outcast and the marginalized. He made sure that people were heard as competent, worthy, redeemable and loved. I think of so many that he touched, including the woman we considered last week who had been bleeding for 12 years. "Your faith has made you whole," he said to her. "Your listening of me and who I am has healed you," he could have easily said. Zacchaeus, the despised chief tax collector (for his profession and his height!) who climbed a sycamore tree just to see Jesus, was heard and seen by Jesus who told him, "I'm coming to visit you at your house." The woman who was about to be stoned to death was heard and seen by Jesus when he said, "Where are your accusers? They have all gone; there are none to condemn you, and neither do I. Go, and sin no more." All those with ears that can hear, should hear, he said many times. We have this little voice inside who judges, criticizes, dismisses and belittles (ourselves included). And then we have God's voice, the voice of Jesus saying, "You are worthy. You are capable. You belong here. You are loved." Today, let's ask ourselves, whose voice is winning? And whose voice, in every given situation going forward, will we be listening to? Do try this at home, kids. Ask God to help you listen to those you love and those you strive to love. Be open to being amazed.