

East Hartford
Feb 2, 4 Ord, 2014

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Micah 6:1-8, Psa 15, Matt 5:1-12

How Shall We Hear??

Imagine what it might have been like that day in ancient, Roman-occupied Israel. Or better yet, imagine what it might be like here, alongside the Connecticut River. This fellow, Jesus of Nazareth has been walking around talking up a storm, and the word is beginning to get around. He's been up in the Windsors, over into Ellington and Manchester, then south and east out towards Marlboro and Glastonbury.

Imagine that your best friend says, "Let's go hear this guy Jesus. They say he is going to be in Wickham Park today. It's a nice day wanna go?"

"Why not? I've got nothing better to do now."

You'd always dreamed of running a bookstore. Finally, about 12 years ago, you cashed in your retirement, maxed out your credit cards and took a loan from your father-in-law in order to scrape enough capital together to open and stock a little store front bookstore not too far from Michael's bakery.

First couple, no, the first five years things were going well enough, but then it all began to go south. Borders Books closed out, Pratt went into one of it's slowdowns, you began to read about rising Kindle and Nook sales. Sales began to slip. Other stores out on Burnside and further north began closing down.

You toughed it out about 7 years then it was time. There weren't enough sales to cover the heat, let alone the rent. You held a closeout sale, and recovered about enough to pay the return shipping on the unsold stock. Finally you closed the door.

The dream? The dream was gone. It had evaporated along time

ago. You still owe money to your father-in-law, your credit rating stinks. On a really good day, you feel about 2 inches high. There hasn't been much work since then. Why not go hear what this guy has to say?

You and your friend drive thru the gates, (he paid the entrance fee, thank God), then you park and walk on up the hill where you see a crowd had gathering. You see a mutual friend. "Hey look, there's Bill. Did you know his wife just passed last month?"

"Yeah, I heard." your buddy said. The two of you join Bill standing side by side in the growing crowd

"Wait!! That's him, that's Jesus over there. Must be his close buddies with him. Be quiet! Listen, he's talking!"

3 *"Blessed are people who are hopeless, because the kingdom of heaven is theirs.*

4 *"Blessed are people who grieve, because they will be comforted.*

5 *"Blessed are people who are humble, because they will inherit the earth.*

6 *"Blessed are people who are hungry and thirsty for righteousness, because they will be fed until they are full.*

7 *"Blessed are people who show mercy, because they will receive mercy.*

8 *"Blessed are people who have pure hearts, because they will see God.*

9 *"Blessed are people who make peace, because they will be called God's children.*

10 *"Blessed are people whose lives are harassed because they are righteous, because the kingdom of heaven is theirs.*

11 *“Blessed are you when people insult you and harass you and speak all kinds of bad and false things about you, all because of me. 12 Be full of joy and be glad, because you have a great reward in heaven. In the same way, people harassed the prophets who came before you.*

Suddenly you feel tears coming to your eyes as his words wrap around and settle into your heart. “Blessed are people who are hopeless, because the kingdom of heaven is theirs.” You realize you’ve been hopeless, helpless, vulnerable ever since your dream evaporated into the dust of the recession. Suddenly you are no longer alone, no longer a failure.

You look at over at Bill. He too, is standing there with the tears flowing freely. He heard the sacred promise, in “blessed are those who grieve, for they will be comforted.” xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

Let’s leave this little story and come back from the springtime hillside in Wickham park to this place, to these friends as we are gathered together to worship and fellowship in the presence of God.

Let me ask, “Where do these words of Jesus echo forward thru time to touch deep places in your heart?”

What kind of God promises

comfort to the grieving?

the kindom God to the poor in spirit -

to those who are beaten down,

the earth to the humble,

mercy to the merciful and so on?

What kind of God do we hear in the sermon on the mount?

What kind of God did you sense as you imagined yourself standing in the crowd???????????

Friends, our sermon title is “How Shall We Hear?” I believe there are a gazillion ways to hear a passage of scripture.

Sometime we listen to learn something, something factual, something historical perhaps, something interesting. I love Bible trivia - tidbits of useless information from or about the scriptures.

Sometimes we listen simply to enjoy - all us of enjoy hearing the Christmas story as given to us by Luke for example. "There went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed...." or "There was a man who had two sons"

Sometimes we listen to learn what we should do - there is a call to clothe the naked, feed the hungry etc.

Sometimes we need to listen in order to hear the voice of God speaking across the centuries into our own time. We listen to the voice of God just to be. xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

The Rule of St. Benedict opens with these words, "listen, and with your hearts hear."

When we need to hear the voice of our living God, we need to listen with the ears of our hearts. We need to listen and with our hearts hear the voice of our God.

One way to do that is to imagine ourselves being in the midst of the story; to become for a tiny bit of time, a member of the crowd that assembled on that mountain. Or perhaps one of the disciples that was there. Were they curious about the adventure they were just beginning, or worried about the Zebedee father they had left behind. Another way to do that is to imagine ourselves being in the midst of the story by moving the entire story forward to another time, to our time, say to Wickham Park.

Friends, "How Shall We Hear?" We hear best when we "listen, and with our hearts, hear."