

Tonight's Scripture readings focus our attention on ears and hearing and listening. As we have listened to and heard these various readings with our own ears, we continue to ponder, what is it that can be said about the ears of Christ this evening that will help us draw closer to the cross on our Lenten journey?

We know that the Triune God always hears our prayers. The Triune God, who claims us as children of God in our baptism, always listens to us and understands us, because God has created us in God's own image. Yes, God hears us. God hears our cries, our sighs, and our "whys?" Why me, O God? Why this? Why now?

The ears of Christ always heard the cries, the sighs, and the whys of people everywhere he went. Tonight's gospel story tells us about a group of people who brought a deaf man with a speech impediment to Jesus, and this group BEGGED Jesus to lay his hands on him.

In another story, there was a blind man who cried out to Jesus, saying, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" And the blind man received his sight. One time, Jesus sent the disciples ahead of him out onto the Sea of Galilee in a boat while he stayed behind to pray. Later that night, he came to them by walking on the water. Jesus heard Peter say to him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." And Jesus said, "Come." And so Peter got out of the boat, and starting walking to Jesus, but when the wind and waves started to pick up and Peter started to sink, the ears of Christ heard Peter cry out, "Lord, save me!" and Jesus caught him, and said, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" Do you think Peter heard that as negative criticism, or positive encouragement?

I think it's safe to say that we all like to hear encouragement from people. We need to hear family and loved ones say, "I love you." We like to hear fellow employees and employers and supervisors say, "You did a good job. Great work!" We like to hear friends say, "Your thoughts and ideas are important to me."

The ears of Christ heard some encouragement from those who heard his call and followed him. In the town of Caesarea Philippi, when Jesus asked the disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" the ears of Christ heard Peter's answer. Peter said: "You are the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the Living God."

Martha, while grieving the death of her brother Lazarus, expressed her faith within earshot of Jesus. The ears of Christ heard her say, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one who is coming into the world."

In Mark's gospel, there is a man who comes to Jesus, seeking healing for his son who had a demonic

spirit that caused him to have convulsions and hurt him. The father comes and speaks into the ears of Christ, saying, “If you are able to do anything, have pity on us and help us.” To which Jesus replied, “All things can be done for the one who believes.” Upon hearing Jesus say this, the father of this demon-possessed son said to Jesus, “I believe! Help my unbelief!”

At his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, Jesus heard the crowds of adults and children crying, “Hosanna! Hosanna to the Son of David!”

Although Jesus had heard these encouragements, the ears of Christ also heard opposition from the scribes and pharisees. They said things such as: “Why do your disciples transgress the traditions of the elders?” “By what authority are you doing these things?” “Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?” “He casts out demons by the power of Satan.”

Even Jesus’ disciples and friends were frustrating for him to listen to. At times, they were confused and perplexed by what Jesus had to say to them. Matthew chapter 15 shows an example of this. After hearing Jesus tell a parable, Peter shows he doesn’t get it, and he says, “Explain this parable to us.” And Jesus, in response, says, “Are you, also, still without understanding?”

In Matthew chapter 17, we hear Matthew’s account of the story of the father with the son who had the demonic spirit, and after Jesus casts the spirit out, the disciples come to Jesus and ask him, “Why couldn’t *we* cast it out?” And Jesus replies, “Because of your little faith.”

The ears of Christ finally heard his disciples desert him and the crowds of people turn on him. Christ’s ears heard Peter’s boast: “Jesus, though all become deserters because of you, I will never desert you.” The ears of Jesus also heard the rooster crow after Peter had denied him three times.

Jesus heard Judas say to him, “Greetings, rabbi!” as Judas came and kissed Jesus in a signal to betray him. And now, instead of crowds shouting Hosanna, Jesus hears another crowd crying, “Crucify him! Crucify him!”

Throughout his life, the ears of Christ heard all the pleas for mercy, and all of the curses and insults directed to him. But the ears of Christ did not depend upon the approval of *people* for Jesus to remain obedient to the Father. While Jesus listened to the people around him, ultimately, the ears of Christ were tuned to listen and to hear the will of God the Father. At his baptism in the river, and again at his transfiguration on top of the

mountain, Christ's ears heard the voice of the Father, saying, "This is my son, the beloved, with whom I am well-pleased. Listen to him!"

Throughout his life of ministry, Jesus went out into the hills and wilderness to pray. The ears of Christ did not need or depend upon the admiration and compliments of people to give him power and perseverance. Instead, the ears of Christ often depended upon hearing what God the Father had to say, so that he would have the strength to meet all the cries, sighs, and whys of the people.

But the ears of Christ finally had to hear silence—even from God. Have you ever felt sometimes that God does not hear your prayers, almost as though God has abandoned you? Jesus shared that pain with us on the cross when he cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

When Jesus died on the cross, the ears of Christ became deaf to all sounds. They could not even hear the silence of the tomb in which he lay. When Jesus died, he suffered the deafness of death which our sins had placed upon him. But the deafness of death did not keep him in the grave. He arose and lives today, living as the Risen One who continues to hear our cries, our sighs, and our whys. And upon hearing us, the Risen Christ comes to be among us in mysterious yet experiential ways. Jesus comes in bread and wine. Jesus comes in the written Word so that we will know him as the living Word. He comes in healing, and in forgiveness. He comes when we share fellowship with others in his name. He comes when we call upon him and worship him.

When Jesus is with us and among us, he calls us to listen for the sounds that his ears heard, so that we might be the ears of Christ, together, with him, in the world. When we are the ears of Christ, then our own ears can be truly opened and our tongues can be loosened, just like the man in tonight's gospel story. When that happens, then we will hear the absolute and complete love of God in Jesus Christ.

And then we can speak again true praise and worship of God. We can speak to share this love with others. The Christ who used his ears to hear is now alive forevermore, and he speaks his saving word to the whole world, saying: "Let anyone with ears listen!" Listen for the good news of Christ. Amen