

"A Listening Church ", Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity, September 22nd, 2019

Philemon v1-25, Mark 5:21-34.

**'A Listening Church' (Everybody Welcome 3).**

**Introduction.**

A friend of mine – Chloe – told me a story that shaped my approach to why welcome is important. She was in Durham and she told me how she visited a busy Anglican church – used to having new people, it was a student church in fact – and she visited three times, and no one spoke to her... Chloe was bright, articulate, not shy... So she never went back...

She never had the chance to talk, to be listened to, to share her joy, what inspires her faith, in fact to share like we hear Paul share in his letter to Philemon, who talks about his joys, what and who has refreshed him spiritually, his experiences in ministry and mission...

Do you like to be listened to?

Another memorable moment. Czech Republic. Missionary Training School. Drahus was a wonderful lady who with her husband did the hospitality. Walking across their square, an American, asked How are you. He kept on walking. She stopped, turned and said to him as he walked past,  
Why do you ask how I am, if you don't want to know...

Drahus is a different story – someone who was spoken to, but actually the person did not want to listen to her, to hear her story, how her day was going...

For me, part of people feeling welcome, is that they feel listened to, and people are open to hearing about about all their lives...

The verses to focus on are Mark 5:33-34 – Then the women, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet, and trembling

with fear, told him the whole truth. He said to her 'Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering.'

She is healed. Jesus has stopped, asks who touched me - he knows what has happened, but he wants her to come forward for a number of reasons - she steps out and it says "tells the whole truth".

Once she stepped out, he could have declared she was healed but he allows her to tell the whole truth - he gives her time, space, attention, he listens.

### **The Whole Truth.**

The whole truth . The word 'truth' is what we expect, Jesus called himself 'I am the Way, the Truth and the Life'.

The word 'whole' – can be interpreted as 'all' 'everything'.

So she tells the whole story – all of what has happened – and it is the truth, she tells, whether it reflected well on her or not.

This is the reason we have so much detail in Mark about her: she had been subject to bleeding for 12 years, that she had suffered a lot under the care of doctors, that she had spent all she had and yet kept slowly getting worse, of what she had thought 'if I just touch his clothes, I will be healed' and how she approached him quietly, and finally her reaction 'immediately, the bleeding stopped, she felt in her body – she was free.'

All this is what she shared.

Let's pause there and think on this a little.

She has had internal bleeding for 12 years.

What this meant - anything she touched was deemed ceremonially unclean (Lev 15:25-end). For example, to touch her bed makes you unclean. She was not allowed to take part in religious processions or even to go to temple. She was religiously isolated. She was cut off from community.

Imagine yourself a little into the story. How old was she?

We have a children's bible, where she is drawn as 'old'? But was she?  
We are not told. All we know is she had money.

Could she have had her illness when she was in her early 20s and was now 35?

She perhaps couldn't marry because of it. Or if she did - was she separated from her husband? What happened to her marriage? Did she have kids?

They weren't meant to be unclean, did they break the law each day and so remain unclean themselves til evening?

Her social contact surely had become minimal.

This has been a terrible time for her. Years of suffering.

So it is beautiful, what we see. Freed. Socially, psychologically, freed to worship, freed to be or have a family...

"Jesus has just exorcised a demon from a man that no one could control; now he heals a woman that no physician can cure and restores to life a girl when all hope is gone." Mark 5:21.

**She needs to come forward.**

Now. What happens here. He knows she is healed. Yet she needs to come forward.

Because of her bleeding, according to the law, she was unclean.  
Now if she had been healed *and it was not publically known*, it would have been difficult to prove to those people who knew she was ill.

Jesus understood her sorrows. He had her appear before the crowd.  
To testify publically she had been healed.

They hear she is healed –He then confirms she had been healed. This is not in her head – she is healed.

And so socially and religiously walls fall down.

Jesus lets her tell the whole story.

It was for her sake.

She had received power, and now Jesus declares, she now received peace, she need not fear she has done something wrong, or deceitful or had stolen something.

The Son of Man says 'Go in peace'.

Physical healing she received.

Spiritual healing - Jesus confirms - her faith did it. "daughter your faith has made you well."

It was not some superstition that did it. It was her faith in him.

And his response: Daughter – no one else is directly addressed by Jesus as daughter - she is not rebuked, she is valued, even if people are realizing that Jesus now is unclean – as she had touched him – for him it does not matter. Even if she has interrupted him – on the way to heal a man's daughter – a 12 girl of value, this woman, ill for 12 years, is of equal value to him...

"He will not allow her to slip away and remain anonymous. He forces the issue so that when she leaves healed, she will leave knowing that the one who healed her knows her and cares for her."

She is a person who is worth taking time with and addressing. Mark 5:21

So I want to ask: physical healing, spiritual healing, did she also receive emotional healing through talking, being listened to?

Jesus listened. How many people had she talked to, over the past years due to her illness?

And he had every reason to move on. The animated film *Miracle Maker*, shows beautifully Jairus' desperation for Jesus to come with him, he knows every moment matters at this stage for his daughter... his restlessness. Jesus listens to the woman.

Comfort can come to talk about all pain and suffering. To be seen and heard.

Was that part of the healing for her, to share publically, with someone so close - she is at his feet - how the past years have been?

**"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." (Dietrich Bonhoeffer)**

**God the great listener.**

It is so true. Just look at the psalms.

The prayer book Jesus knew. The range of things that can be said to God.

Tim Keller says of the Psalms:

"Psalms depicts every human situation--wonderful to horrific--and every emotional condition. In every case it shows how to process the condition in prayer before God, even when it means a long period of darkness."

John Calvin: I have been accustomed to call this book, I think not inappropriately, "An Anatomy of all the Parts of the Soul;" for there is not an emotion of which any one can be conscious that is not here represented as in a mirror.

In fact, we need so much for God to be the Great Listener! I mean can you imagine that God wasn't a great listener to you. Whenever you want to talk to him he listens. He pays full attention to you. Total attention as Jesus shows to the woman. He allows you to tell him the whole truth every time you meet with him. And you can start today...

It is worth thinking about Jesus interactions for example in John and consider how he is listening - Nicodemus, Samaritan woman, Mary and Martha at Lazarus tomb, Mary Magdalene at the empty tomb...

Jesus is a person of totally focused loving listening.

God the Great Listener. And in whose work we share.

Everybody Welcome. I think welcome needs to include, that people feel listened to. The joys and thanksgivings and challenges they want to share – like Paul does to Philemon – and the pain, difficulties, worries. At the Parenting Teenagers course, we focused on Emotions being shared by our teens. And the Psychologist said – we will usually say we want our teens to express their emotions – but we often mean the ones we like, we want to see, not the awkward ones, the challenging ones...

Listening is being present to it all. To walk in the footsteps, to be like Jesus... the Great listener. He allowed people to tell the whole truth.

**To be a Listening community.** What a gift.

What a welcome. I am welcome fully.

Not only welcome when I do not speak...

### **Applications: How to listen?**

Bonhoeffer says:

"There is a kind of listening with half an ear that presumes already to know what the other person has to say. It is an impatient, inattentive listening..."

**Mary Rose O'Reilly.**

**"We pay attention only long enough to develop a counter argument... people often listen with an agenda, to sell or petition or seduce. Seldom is there a deep open hearted unjudging reception of the other. By contrast if someone truly listens to me, my spirit begins to expand."**

I often tell a story in wedding – maybe I will on Friday or not! – a story that has inspired and shaped my own attempts in ministry - about Corrie Ten Boom, the Dutch Christian. How when she talked and listened to you, you felt as if you were the only person in the room – you were her total attention.

Each of us shares in the ministry of listening I believe.  
We all can listen. Listening can be - just that, to listen.  
Other times it means listening, asking questions, responding.

That can be just one of the gifts we can offer each in community - genuine focused listening.

In our community we have different activities to help us as a listening community.

**In our life groups.** There is deliberate time built into each life group towards the end, where we ask each other, how can we pray for each other – we listen as a person shares, whether that is about the topic, or a hurt, or something wonderful.

**Our Prayer Ministry teams** – they will ask you what you would like to receive prayer for – they listen – and then they pray for you, listening also to what the Holy Spirit may want to say to guide prayers or to say to the person.

We also have a **Pastoral Care and Visiting team** - Marianne Tucker and Jolanda - who are willing to visit you and talk and listen about things that matter, and to pray with you. Church may not be a place to share about such things. But Jolanda and Marianne, as part of their work following the Great Listener, are willing to visit you and to talk and listen - do talk to them if you'd like one of them to visit.

### **Conclusion**

#### **A Listening Community - a mark of a church community.**

We share in the ministry of listening committed to us by the One who is himself the Great Listener. Jesus was busy, he had many reasons not to listen, yet he listened as the woman, the lady, told the whole truth. After she did so, she knew she was valued – Daughter – assured - she knew why was she healed – your faith – and she left in peace, her fears removed...

Shall we pray.

Dear Lord Jesus,  
Help me take my direction from you, Lord Jesus,  
for you are the perfect listener.

There's no one quicker to listen than you. I never have to snap my fingers to get your attention.  
I never catch you looking away, as though you're bored with me.  
I never have to repeat myself several times to make sure you heard what I really said.



You never twist what I'm saying. You never talk over me when I'm trying to tell you something. There's no one who listens as attentively, respectfully, and compassionately as you.

Help me become a better and much more engaged listener.  
Jesus, I don't need healing for deafness but grace for listening—first and foremost to you  
and secondly to the people you love.

Lord Jesus, I'm confident of your care and expectant of your help.  
So I pray, in the riches and greatness of your name.  
Amen.