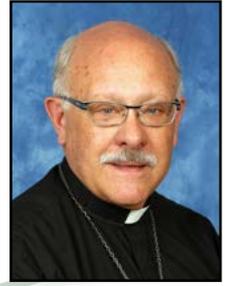




Hear the Word

from Pastor James N. McEachran



Gather... Encourage... Equip... Send...

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

June 17, 2018

Listen UP!

Mark 7:31-37

Our theme on these Summer Sundays is "Growing Forward." The clear calling to move out of the past, beyond today, and into the future that God has in mind for us as faithful disciples.

On this, and on next Sunday, two accounts from Mark which embody healing, leading to truly hearing and truly seeing. For this Lord's Day --- Listen UP!

Jesus moves have been and will be in and around Gentile country for a healing miracle and the Feeding of the 4000. The clear message is that the gift of salvation is meant for all, engages a change in relationship, and is, above all, gracious and generous beyond all expectation.

Here is the setting: deaf man, words with friends. They bring him to Jesus, the worker of miracles.

Pace quickens --- Private, respectful, healing moment. Action: touch and prayer; a word, "Ephphatha, BE OPENED." And they were, his ears and his words!

Jesus instructs that they tell no one. A peculiar instruction which leads to open witness and astonishment as the people say "Wow, this Jesus does everything well." As if to say, "This is a once in a lifetime visitation from God!"

I was always taught with a saying familiar to each of us: "You have two ears, and one tongue. Best to listen twice as much as you speak."

In growing forward along the way, readings commend that which needs to engage us in times of deep listening, active engagement with one another as those in relationship in times of change, transition and renewal.

I commend that when that occurs, tones of grace will prevail in this community and in the places we share our live with others. But, first, we have to be still and listen for God.

Jeremiah got that to the minute when his life was changed on hearing the word of the Lord. Discipleship, is like that too. We begin by being in the Word of God.

His call was pretty colorful. Filled with promise as he heard that God had a plan for him from the beginning, in the womb. And the call was to be bold in witness---even to speak to power!

No room for excuses. Even to say "I am too young, a boy, a girl, a child." For with the call, heard well, comes the spoken word of promise: "...you shall go to whom I send you, speak whatever I command you, for I am with you." Courage comes from the promise of the One who sends to speak after listening.

Tones of grace to be spoken are first heard through the Word of God. Like the foundational words of Paul to the Romans and to each of us.

It is the assurance that the God who raised Jesus from the dead, the Jesus in whom you believe and call 'Lord,' is the one who equips us with the words to share, the actions of love, that become the foundation of Faith for others. As, in our mission in difficult and anxious times.

Recall the Joshua consultancy? They listened! And at the delivery of their Waypoints, we were challenged to three distinct steps: Listen! Learn! Dream!

Listening comes by hearing; learning comes by speaking; only then can we dream and vision with the Holy Spirit about the times before us in Christ.

The healing miracle in the Gospel is only found in Mark. I believe he held it as a pivot point and even an enacted parable of what Jesus' life has meant and means for disciples then, and now, as Jesus moves every closer to Jerusalem, to the Cross, to the Empty Tomb, and into our lives each and every day.

Listen UP! People of God, the times are ripe for good news. The daily assault of breaking news, the unknown in which our nation and the world seems to be rocking in uncertainty, the good news of Jesus tethers us to mission with words and action meant to bring forgiveness/reconciliation and direction for us and for the church in our times.

I believe, I am confident, that visioning growing forward is not about sweeping away the past, but building on the firm foundation already in place. To move along with new words of narrative that, knowing there is no series of crisis in this place, we can enfold each member in dreaming new and gracious ways to be about and BOLD IN MISSION!

Here is what I ask: attend Vision Workshops, speak and share with others, BE OPENED, to dream and to move out in the power of the Holy Spirit. But, most of all, talk with one another, cross-generationally, cross-point of view, but always at the foot of the Cross, at Font, Table, and through the Word to listen to God before speaking, on the brink of acting, that all might know that we have been with Jesus!

Growing Forward...deeper, with one another. Our Semi-Annual Meeting has been held; 160 were present; we heard updates on the action of our leadership, ministry engagement like "Lattes for the Lord."

The Holy Spirit is active in this place to remind us that the tones of mission are found expressed in humble hospitality, being willing to respond when asked to serve, and to be in worship where we are tethered to the love that will never let go of us so that we may go out with confidence and courage to the ends of the earth. (Which is for most of us the circumference of our day!)

Seven times in the Gospels, Jesus says, "Let anyone with ears to hear listen." (Mark 4:9) That is where things truly begin to build us up in the Lord!

In the days ahead, Listen! God is calling and leading; Listen! To One another!

The words of Herman G. Stuempfle, soon to be sung, set a first tone for GROWING FORWARD---

**"Come Christ, as once of old, and by your power heal out deafened ears,
our muted tongues; your grace again reveal."**

People of God, Be Opened! Amen!