

LISTENING ALONGSIDE



ECHOING CHRIST

Lenten Devotions 2017

Ash Wednesday, March 1, 2017

By Jody Wright

"Whoever has ears to hear, let him hear."

Jesus

On one of our recent spring-like winter days, I sat down on the back steps to rest after a full day of working in the yard. The sun was beginning to hide behind the trees, sketching shadows along our back fence and pushing the woods toward darkness. Taking their cue that night was not far off, the cicadas, frogs, and crickets in the neighborhood began their evening prayer, chanting with a rhythm that surely was pulsing in the heart of the divine.

I breathed in the sweet air and with it came memories of games, parties, meals, and work shared in that yard. I thought of how many nights our family had heard this song and what a gift the nearness of nature is to us. I thought of our children and grandchildren scattered throughout the world and wished for them to share the moment with me.

I reached for my phone and began a video in which I panned back and forth over the yard. By this time it was nearly dark, but it was not so much the sight that I wanted to capture as it was the sound. In a little over a minute, I was able to lift those sounds from the air and send them up north and overseas where they filled that air with the sounds of home. Although it was not the same as our family being together, the next best thing was listening together to what home sounds like.

Frequently when he taught, Jesus concluded a lesson, a sermon, or a story with the admonition, "Whoever has ears to hear, let him hear." Day by day, but especially during Lent, it is important for us to listen for God and to God. As part of the Body of Christ, it is essential that we listen together to what God is saying to us all.

Beginning today, Ash Wednesday, we "listen alongside" one another in order that we might then "echo Christ" to one another as we live in the world. What do we hear when we listen? Does

it remind us of our true "home"? How might we share what we hear with others so that they might "hear home" as well? We may discover that the sound of God speaking is as familiar as the sounds in our own backyard. Unless we make the effort to listen, however, the sounds in our lives may never amount to anything other than a dull roar. When we do listen, we might just hear the heartbeat of God.

Listen.

Prayer

THE VOICE OF SILENCE

By Bruce Prewer

I'll praise my Maker while I've breath!

You are the Silence where only the truth is spoken,
the Void which is always full and overflowing,
the Turbulence where quietness is supreme,
and the Depth which soars higher than the heavens.

You are the Solitary where only community flourishes,
the Darkness in which light perpetual shines,
the Nameless which names and weighs each sparrow,
the Mystery where secrets are openly displayed.

You are the Battlefield where peace alone holds sway,
the Forsakenness where the lost at last come home,
the Dove which descends though it is already with us,
the Unsearchable which is found by little children.

You are my divine emptiness and my fullness,
my healing pain and my exquisite joy!

I'll praise my Savior while I've breath
and when my voice is lost in death,
love shall fulfil my rising joy.

Psalm 51

Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.
Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin.

For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.
Against you, you alone, have I sinned,
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you are justified in your sentence
and blameless when you pass judgement.
Indeed, I was born guilty,
a sinner when my mother conceived me.

You desire truth in the inward being;
therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.
Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones that you have crushed rejoice.
Hide your face from my sins,
and blot out all my iniquities.

Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right spirit within me.
Do not cast me away from your presence,
and do not take your holy spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and sustain in me a willing spirit.

Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
and sinners will return to you.
Deliver me from bloodshed, O God,
O God of my salvation,
and my tongue will sing aloud of your deliverance.

O Lord, open my lips,
and my mouth will declare your praise.
For you have no delight in sacrifice;
if I were to give a burnt-offering, you would not be pleased.
The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

“Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven. So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

“And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. “And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.