

## LISTENING ALONGSIDE



### ECHOING CHRIST

## Lenten Devotions 2017

**Friday,  
March 3, 2017**

By Elizabeth Edwards

For the Lord has comforted his people,  
and will have compassion on his suffering ones.

But Zion said, "The Lord has forsaken me,  
my Lord has forgotten me."

Can a woman forget her nursing-child,  
or show no compassion for the child of her womb?  
Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you.  
See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands;  
Isaiah 49:13b-16a

For new parents, hearing becomes not just a heightened sense, but a skill to hone. In those first few weeks with a newborn, you wake up in the night to listen for the sound of his breathing. Very quickly, you learn to listen for her cries—not only the sound of them but also to distinguish a hungry cry from an "I just want attention" cry from a cry of pain. And pretty soon, you listen for, or rather hope for, enough silence to get a few hours of uninterrupted sleep, only to drag your weary self out of bed when you hear that familiar pre-dawn wail.

Children learn to listen, too. We're told that infants learn to distinguish voices in utero and that by the time they are born, they can recognize their mother's voice. Nursery sound machines which provide comforting music or sounds of nature like the ocean or birds chirping help to soothe a fussy little one to sleep. It doesn't take babies long to listen for the sound of movement in the house so that someone will come and get them out of the crib. And children learn very early to discern what mood Mommy is in by listening to the tone of her voice.

When our children are little, we sometimes long for solitude and silence and look forward to a time when they will be more self-sufficient so that they don't need to call out to us for every little thing. But the cries and coos of infancy and the incessant chatter and questions of the preschool years yield to the raucous play and bickering of childhood and then become pubescent grunts and eye rolls, until, I'm told, parents eventually hope they'll get a quick, "Bye, Mom," as their young adult child rushes out the door, leaving the house in total silence. Our desire for quiet in the early years will give way to a yearning to hear those bustling, stillness-piercing noises one day.

Sometimes I wonder if God is like that with us. Not that God is like a new parent who grows weary of hearing us call out, for by now, God has been about this business of caring for children for a long time. No, I wonder if God waits patiently for us, listening for our cries, longing for us to realize our need of him and offer more than a passing greeting as we hurry out the door to attend to our busy lives. And I wonder if God hopes that we will remember how to distinguish his voice from all the din which assaults our senses, recognizing the sound of our loving, proud Parent who is ready to speak to us, offering guidance and comfort, eager to welcome us home.

## Prayer

Speak, Lord, and let me hear your voice.  
Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening . . .  
Amen.

## Psalm 139:1-18. 23-24

O Lord, you have searched me and known me.  
You know when I sit down and when I rise up;  
you discern my thoughts from far away.  
You search out my path and my lying down,  
and are acquainted with all my ways.  
Even before a word is on my tongue,  
O Lord, you know it completely.  
You hem me in, behind and before,  
and lay your hand upon me.  
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;  
it is so high that I cannot attain it.

Where can I go from your spirit?  
Or where can I flee from your presence?  
If I ascend to heaven, you are there;  
if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.

If I take the wings of the morning  
and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,  
even there your hand shall lead me,  
and your right hand shall hold me fast.  
If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me,  
and the light around me become night,"  
even the darkness is not dark to you;  
the night is as bright as the day,  
for darkness is as light to you.

For it was you who formed my inward parts;  
you knit me together in my mother's womb.  
I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.  
Wonderful are your works;  
that I know very well.  
My frame was not hidden from you,  
when I was being made in secret,  
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.  
Your eyes beheld my unformed substance.  
In your book were written  
all the days that were formed for me,  
when none of them as yet existed.  
How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God!  
How vast is the sum of them!  
I try to count them—they are more than the sand;  
I come to the end—I am still with you.

Search me, O God, and know my heart;  
test me and know my thoughts.  
See if there is any wicked way in me,  
and lead me in the way everlasting.

### **John 10:22-30**

At that time the festival of the Dedication took place in Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the portico of Solomon. So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly." Jesus answered, "I have told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name testify to me; but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father's hand. The Father and I are one."