

## LISTENING ALONGSIDE



## ECHOING CHRIST

### **Lenten Devotions 2017**

**Monday,  
March 20, 2017**

By Bill Hoyle

It was a warm Friday in July, well before the time when a Sam's Club was located in Rocky Mount. At the time, we made a once-a-month trip to the Sam's Club, located on Capital Boulevard in Raleigh, to stock up on certain items. I remember that I had to park some distance from the store entrance because there were so many vehicles in the parking lot that day. I had just finished loading my vehicle, got in, and let the window down to let fresh air in and hot air out, when I glanced into the rear view mirror and saw a man running across the parking lot headed directly toward my vehicle.

I thought to myself, "Uh, oh, someone else looking for a handout or to try to sell me something I do not need." Before I was able to hit the button to close the window, there he stood. He was not badly dressed, but was in great need of some dental work.

The man then said, "Could you help me?" I said, "What is it that you need?" He began to explain that he, his wife, and daughter had traveled to Raleigh from Fayetteville for a shopping trip and his automobile had broken down on a street not too far away.

He needed money for bus tickets for his wife and daughter to get back to Fayetteville. I quickly asked, "Are you not traveling with them?" He replied that he would stay with the car until repairs could be made. I then asked, "How much do you need for one-way bus tickets to Fayetteville for two people?" He said he had checked, and it would be \$18.73. I then asked the man, "Out of all of these vehicles in this parking lot, how did you happen to run to my vehicle?" He simply pointed skyward and smiled. I thought to myself, "Uh, huh, good answer."

Then I asked him, "Do you belong to a church in Fayetteville?" He quickly identified a church by name, which, of course, I had no way to check for accuracy. Then I reached into my pocket and discovered I had \$18 in bills. I then reached into a pocket where I kept change and found 73 cents. I reached through the window and gave the man the money and said, "That is every last bit of money I have on me at this time." He said, "God bless you, brother," and he slowly walked away.

My first reaction was, "I have just been flim-flammed." It took a moment to gather my thoughts and then it hit me: Was that just a monumental coincidence that I had the exact amount of money the man asked for, or was I just the easiest touch in the parking lot that day? At that same moment, I was sitting still, I could not help hearing the words of scripture ringing in my head that I had heard many times, when Jesus said, "when you have done it to the least of these, you have done it unto me."

When I got home, I called my son, a Methodist minister, and related my experience in Raleigh. My first words were, "I was in Raleigh today sitting in the parking lot a Sam's Club on Capital Boulevard, and I wonder if I was flim-flammed." After I related my experience, he quickly responded, "No, Dad, you did the right thing. You responded to his request as you remembered the teachings of Jesus. It was between that man and God as to what he did with the gift you gave him."

I look back on the experience as an example of listening to God, and echoing Christ. I also had and have a difficult time overlooking the fact that I had the exact amount of money on my person when the man made the request. What if I had just told him I did not have the money? I think I would have regretted that response to this day. I came to believe that I was as blessed as the stranger in the parking lot that day.

## Prayer

O God, help us in our everyday, hectic lives to take every opportunity to listen to the whispers of your voice. Help us to listen more closely to those in need of help so that we may not miss the chance to echo Christ to others who cross our paths. Open our hearts and minds that we may listen more intently to your guiding message as we strain to overcome our skepticism in circumstances which may seem strange to us. We thank you, God, for the many ways you bless us as we try to answer your call to be a blessing to others as we seek to echo Christ to those around us. Amen.

### Matthew 25:31-40

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, "Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me." Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?" And the king will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."

### Romans 8:18-27

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the

heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.