

LISTENING ALONGSIDE



ECHOING CHRIST

Lenten Devotions 2017

**Sunday,
March 12, 2017**

Throughout this Lenten season, in addition to sharing reflections from members of the congregation and other poems, quotes, and thoughts about listening for God, we will also offer suggestions for spiritual exercises or disciplines that may be useful as we seek to listen alongside one another and learn better how to echo the life and teachings of Christ.

From *The Good and Beautiful God* by James Bryan Smith

Listening for God in creation

Historically, great theologians have cited the created world and its beauty as the first sign of God's goodness. Paul said as much in the opening chapter of his epistle to the Romans. Creation speaks of the goodness and glory of God through dazzling colors and intoxicating scents. The sunrises and sunsets are grand spectacles that happen twice each day and are seldom noticed by people too busy to look. God could have made an ugly world; he was not obligated to make a world that inspires awe. Beauty has a lot to do with order. Simply gazing at a daisy reveals the mind of God.

In her book, *Experiencing God's Tremendous Love*, Maureen Conroy advises us to "become deeply absorbed in creation" as a way of experiencing God's goodness and love. She advocates this exercise experience: take a walk outside and pay great attention to the sights, sounds, and colors of nature. If you have access, go to a park or some place that is relatively untouched by humans. Take something to write on and act as if you are on a mission to canvass a small area, jotting down everything you see and hear. Pretend you're trying to communicate what you are seeing to someone who has never been able to go outdoors and experience the beauty of the created world. Note the color of the birds, the symmetry of the leaves, and the sounds of the wind. Think of God as a great artist and yourself as the art student, paying close attention to the detail of the artwork.¹

¹James Bryan Smith. *The Good and Beautiful God*. InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL, 2009, 53-54.

Prayer

Gracious God, for the gifts of life and land and lake, for entrusting into our human hands your most precious creation, we are more than grateful. We are humbled by your trust, by your expectation that we will tend these gifts faithfully. With trepidation we acknowledge your expectation that we will protect your treasured gifts from harm. And with humility we respond with our promise to preserve them for all people, for generations yet to be born, for children whose names we will never know, whose faces we will never see. We pray this day that we might be claimed anew by your love and transformed by your generosity. Grant us courage. Instill in us a passion for tenderness as we awaken anew to the demands of thanks-giving.

Joan Brown Campbell

Job 12:7-10

But ask the animals, and they will teach you;
the birds of the air, and they will tell you;
ask the plants of the earth, and they will teach you;
and the fish of the sea will declare to you.
Who among all these does not know
that the hand of the Lord has done this?
In his hand is the life of every living thing
and the breath of every human being.

Ephesians 2:4-10

But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God— not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.