

Day of Pentecost - June 8, 2025

Acts 2:1–21

“Listening to God”

1. There is a difference between listening and just hearing
 - a. (Apologies to the Men’s Group, who’ve heard this story before) After a long search, a Pastor Nominating Committee called this dynamic woman as their new pastor.
 - i. The Committee was very excited when the first Sunday came and she would preach her first sermon to the church.
 - ii. And, wow, she did not disappoint!
 - iii. It was an insightful, interesting and inspiring sermon!
 - iv. The committee members were so pleased, and they lined up to thank the pastor, and congratulated themselves on their good work.
 - v. But something strange happened the next Sunday. The pastor preached the SAME sermon!
 - vi. Committee members in the congregation looked at each other from across the pews in the congregation.
 - vii. They were so confused
 - viii. After worship, they gathered over coffee and concluded that what must have happened was that since it was such a good sermon, and since there were surely some people who hadn’t been able to make it to her first Sunday, that she thought to share it one more time. That must be it.
 - ix. They decided they would not bring it up with her.
 - x. But, astonishingly, the third Sunday she AGAIN preached the SAME sermon
 - xi. Now the committee members were worried.
 - xii. They were texting each other during the sermon.
 - xiii. They could see how other members of the congregation were looking at each other, confused.
 - xiv. The committee needed to act, so after worship they went up to the pastor.
 - xv. They said: “We are so happy to have you here pastor, we feel that God led us to you and brought you here to lead us”
 - xvi. “However, we are a bit concerned. Your sermon on your first Sunday was terrific, but you’ve now preached it two more times.”
 - xvii. “Well,” the new pastor replied “if you start doing the things I’m telling you in this first sermon, I’ll give you the next one!”
 - b. As any mom will tell you: there is a difference between hearing the words mom says and really listening to what she’s asking us to do!
 - i. It’s like things go in one ear and come out the other, they’d say
 - ii. It’s not just about nodding while mom is telling us what to do, but it is about putting it into practice, following what she has said.
2. Our reading for today, the recounting of the events of Pentecost, offer some layers about what it means not just to hear but really listen to what God is saying.

- a. The festival of Pentecost which was being celebrated by the people of Jerusalem that day had had its beginnings as a festival to thank God for the harvest, presenting the first fruits in thanksgiving to God
 - i. It comes fifty days after the festival of the Passover, a festival which celebrated the liberation of the Hebrew slaves under the leadership of Moses from captivity in Egypt
 - ii. So every year they would celebrate freedom, and then the abundance of the harvest.
 - iii. And Pentecost (Shavuot) also came to be a celebration of God giving of the Torah, the Law, through Moses to the people.
 - iv. Both Passover and Pentecost were considered “traveling” festivals, so there were pilgrimages of people from all over Palestine to Jerusalem for these celebrations
 - v. And, interestingly, we also read that there were Jewish people from all over the world who were now living in Jerusalem, immigrants, who were part of the community which called this place home.
- b. So this is the setting, fifty days after the resurrection, when the disciples were gathered in one house in Jerusalem to pray.
 - i. It is then when the commotion described in the passage happened
 - ii. It was 9am in the morning, and a noise that sounded like the rushing wind shook the place
 - iii. And there were these little things like flames over each of the disciples
 - iv. And the noise wasn’t done yet: the disciples were overcome by the experience and started to praise God loudly!
 - v. But as it happened, they were doing so in languages they didn’t speak!
 - vi. Think of when you’ve traveled abroad in a place which doesn’t primarily speak your language, and then suddenly as you’re walking over to get breakfast, this one house in the corner has all this shouting and yelling in English.
 - vii. Of course you’d make a detour to find out what was happening!
 - viii. All those immigrant Jews from all over the world found themselves drawn to that loud house to find out what was going on, and to figure out why they were hearing their languages
 - ix. And it wasn’t just one language; it was so many!
 - x. These immigrants were devout people, religious people, who were participating in an ancient celebration, and they are confounded because they had never experienced anything like this before.
 - xi. Some tried to minimize it and make fun of it (never mind, they’re drunk)
 - xii. But most knew deep down that didn’t sound right. So they gathered and listened.
 - xiii. And they were surprised.
- c. Peter was the preacher that day, and he took his passage from the prophet Joel
 - i. God is speaking to you, people of Judea, just like God has done in the past
 - ii. In fact, God has spoken in many ways and through many different people

1. Remember, they were celebrating that God had spoken through Moses and had given them the Law, which outlined the expectations God had of the people.
2. And over the generations there had been other faithful messengers who had proclaimed God's message
- iii. But the problem then as it is now, Peter was basically saying, is that you're not listening to what God is saying, not really.
 1. In fact, Peter says, right now is the time that the prophet was talking about
 2. God is no longer using the same voices to share God's message
 3. Now the Spirit of God will be poured out on ALL people
 4. The message will come from sons, daughters, siblings, young, old and in between, even slaves and servants will speak with God's words
 5. It will be shocking! It will be surprising, like eclipses in the skies and signs on earth.
 6. But, Peter concludes, it will make a difference, because people will finally listen and they will be able to be connected to God!
3. When we listen for what God is saying, we have to tune in, really listen, especially because God's message can come to us in surprising ways
 - a. First we have to acknowledge that it isn't enough just to hear what God has to say, especially when we recall the things Jesus taught and the way he lived out his message
 - b. It's not enough to hear that we should love our neighbor as ourselves: it's about listening for guidance from Jesus and receiving from the Spirit the compassion, care and courage which is needed to love our neighbor (not just the likeable ones, or the ones who did us a favor, or the ones who agree with us)
 - c. It's not enough to hear that we should seek justice for those who are oppressed: it's about listening for guidance from Jesus and receiving from the Spirit the passion, determination and clarity needed to call out and oppose injustice, to put ourselves on the line to serve prophetically even at personal risk.
 - d. God speaks today not only from pulpits, but through people in the school bus, at the gas station, in the homeless shelter, in the hospital room, at the kitchen table, at the Pride festival...
 - e. God speaks in unexpected ways, which is part of the message of the prophet Joel.
 - f. And the call is for us not just to be curious about all the commotion, but to stop and listen, and take to heart that this is God speaking to us.
4. Be attentive and listen, ready to hear God's voice in the most unexpected places. Be inspired and act as God is guiding you.

Sources: <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/day-of-pentecost-3/commentary-on-acts-21-21-18>

<https://www.jmberlin.de/en/topic-shavuot>