

*“Listen to Him!”*

Charles Marsh described this dramatic encounter between Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Risen Jesus Christ in his book, *Welcoming Justice*, “[In January 1956, Martin Luther King Jr.] returned home around midnight after a long day of organizational meetings. His wife and young daughter were already in bed, and King was eager to join them. But a threatening call — the kind of call he was getting as many as 30 to 40 times a day — interrupted his attempt to get some much-needed rest. When he tried to go back to bed, he could not shake the menacing voice that kept repeating the hateful words in his head.

King got up, made a pot of coffee, and sat down at his kitchen table. With his head buried in his hands, he cried out to God. There in his kitchen in the middle of the night, when he had come to the end of strength, King met the living Christ in an experience that would carry him through the remainder of his life.” **“I heard the voice of Jesus saying still to fight on,’ King later recalled.”** ““He promised never to leave me, never to leave me alone ... He promised never to leave me, no never alone.’

In the stillness of the Alabama night, the voice of Jesus proved more convincing than the threatening voice of the anonymous caller. The voice of Jesus gave him the courage to press through the tumultuous year of 1956 to the victorious end of the Montgomery Bus Boycott. More than that, it gave him a vision for ministry that would drive him for the rest of his life.” [Charles Marsh, *Welcoming Justice* (IVP Books, 2009), pp. 16-17; source: Men of Integrity (January/February 2011)]

Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. was comforted, moved, and inspired because he listened to Jesus! That spiritual experience was not the only time he listened to Jesus. Rev. King also listened to Jesus while he grew up and heard his father quote Jesus from the New Testament Gospels. He obviously, also heard Jesus as he studied the Scriptures and read what Jesus said in his teachings and his public ministry. **Clearly, King used many of the words of Jesus as he developed and carried out his non-violent protests against racism and discrimination on behalf of civil rights and unity.**

Our Scripture Reading revealed another amazing and awesome event during which the disciples of Jesus heard a voice – the Voice of God! “Lori Brandt Hale imagines a ‘cosmic hand’ from heaven, ‘reaching down to give Peter a good ‘you-are-missing-the point’ slap upside the head.’” Taking that into consideration, let’s look again at **verse 35, “A Voice said from the cloud, ‘This is My Son, whom I have chosen — listen to him!’”** In addition to God declaring Jesus’ Sonship, the Divine Parent called the slow to understand and the poor at paying attention disciples to listen to Jesus!

Seeing ourselves as followers or disciples of Jesus Christ, we are also called to listen to Jesus! Frankly, I usually focus on what Jesus tells us, instead of on the New Testament Epistles or Old Testament texts in my sermons. The reason I put such a heavy emphasis on considering what Jesus said and did is because our society, unfortunately, frequently defines Christianity to be more like what John the Baptist preached and like the Jewish legalism of the Pharisees, Teachers of the Law, and the High Priest. The Popular Understanding of the Christian Faith is focused on the selfish desire to have life after death and the mechanics of how one obtains paradise or heaven. Although the Good News Jesus preached includes his revelation that God’s Self-Giving and Suffering Agape Love already forgives us and invites us to live the Eternal Life and Relationship with God as an unmerited gift – Grace, there is much more to what that New Life in Christ and the New Faith Relationship with God means! **What Jesus told his original disciples and tells us, along with his example of the way to live, provides us encouragement, guidance, and empowerment to live the New Life in Christ – to be people who listen to Jesus and our Still Speaking God.** Since God instructs us to listen to what Jesus tells us, let’s take this time to remember – to listen to some of Jesus’ very important messages.

First, it seems clear Luke took to heart God’s command to listen to Jesus and so, that gospel author put considerable focus on Jesus’ teachings, especially his parables. We will be lifting up a significant number of those lessons and stories reported in the Gospel of Luke, as well as, some from the Gospel of John. Our Pew Bibles often divide up portions of the gospels with titles for each section. I will list those section or my own section titles with their text designations, along with a brief summary of what took place, and then I will share a verse or so of what Jesus said in that section of the gospel to lift up – focus on specific and important things our Savior tells us.

Listen to Jesus – **Lord of the Sabbath and Healing on the Sabbath (Luke 6:1-10) (John 5:15-17)** – In Luke, after some Pharisees complained to Jesus about his disciples picking heads of wheat to eat on a Sabbath, he challenged their interpretation of their Law and declared in **Luke 6:5, “The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.”** On another Sabbath Jesus healed a man with a paralyzed hand but first, he challenged some Pharisees and Teachers of the Law saying in **Luke 6:9, “I ask you: What does our Law allow us to do on the Sabbath? To help or to harm? To save a man’s life or destroy it?”** Jesus demonstrated the inappropriateness of the legalists’ rigid demands which were based on their interpretation of their Law. In the Gospel of John, Jesus healed a paralyzed man on the Sabbath and when he reported Jesus healed him and the Jewish authorities attacked Jesus, he answered in **John 5:17, “My Father is always working, and I too must work.”** **Jesus made it clear God is still working and speaking – we are able to come to a better understanding – legalism fails to acknowledge God’s Continuing Work and Message.**

Listen to Jesus – **Love for Enemies (Luke 6:27-36)** – Jesus preached the amazing message to “love your enemies”. He gave numerous examples of how even the ungodly loved those who loved them. Jesus concluded his point in **Luke 6:35-36**, ***“No! Love your enemies and do good to them: lend and expect nothing back. You will then have a great reward, and you will be sons of the Most High God. For He is good to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful just as your Father is merciful.”*** Emotionally, the Pharisees and the Teachers of the Law must have been ready to explode! Jesus had declared God blesses “the ungrateful and the wicked”!

Listen to Jesus – **Judging Others (Luke 6:37-38)** – Jesus was not finished turning the world upside down! He continued to argue for God’s Agape Love and Gracious Forgiveness and for us to follow God’s example. Jesus said, in **Luke 6:37-38**, ***“Do not judge others, and God will not judge you; do not condemn others, and God will not condemn you; forgive others, and God will forgive you. Give to others, and God will give to you. Indeed, you will receive a full measure, a generous helping, poured into your hands – all that you can hold. The measure you use for others is the one that God will use for you.”***

Listen to Jesus – **Whoever Is Not against You Is for You (Luke 9:49-50)** – The disciple, John, reported how the disciples had told a man who was driving out demons in Jesus’ name to stop because he did not belong to their group. Jesus responded in **Luke 9:50**, ***“Do not try to stop him because whoever is not against you is for you.”*** Making “the other” our enemy is a temptation, to which many politicians and their followers frequently succumb. It has also divided many groups of people, who have sought to be persons of faith.

Listen to Jesus – **The Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37)** – Jesus responded to a question about the requirements “to receive eternal life” in such a way that either the Teacher of the Law or Jesus (depending on which gospel one reads) said we should love God with our all and in **verse 27b**, ***“Love your neighbor as you love yourself.”*** The questioner tried to “justify himself” and asked Jesus, “Who is my neighbor?” Jesus answered with the Parable of the Good Samaritan, in which a hated Samaritan was the neighbor toward a man attacked by robbers. Therefore, our neighbor is even those persons rejected by society and the Jewish religious establishment.

Listen to Jesus – **Humility and Hospitality (Luke 14:7-14)** – Jesus noticed the selfish and self-serving behavior of all the guests at a gathering he attended and he counseled in **Luke 14:13-14a**, ***“When you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind; and you will be blessed, because they are not able to pay you back. God will repay you on the day the (just) rise from death.”*** Indeed, Jesus modeled Radical and Extravagant Hospitality toward all the outcasts and the powerless of society!

Listen to Jesus – **The Parable of the Lost Sheep (Luke 15:1-7)** – After the Pharisees and Teachers of the Law were critical of Jesus for welcoming the outcasts, he told the Parable of the Lost Sheep. Jesus said in **Luke 15:7**, ***“In the same way, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who (changes) than over ninety-nine respectable people who do not need to (change).”***

Listen to Jesus – **The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31)** – Illustrating that the self-centered life of the rich and powerful is not the way of God and God’s Agape Love and Care, Justice is especially for those mistreated by the world’s privileged. Jesus explained in **Luke 16:25**, ***“But Abraham said, ‘Remember, my son, that in your lifetime you were given all the good things, while Lazarus got all the bad things. But now he is enjoying himself here, while you are in pain.’”***

Listen to Jesus – **Washing Feet (John 13:12-17)** – On the night he would be betrayed, while Jesus was eating his last meal with his disciples, he washed their feet. He explained the reason for his washing their feet in **John 13:14-15**, ***“I, your Lord and Teacher, have just washed your feet. You, then, should wash one another’s feet. I have set an example for you, so that you will do just what I have done for you.”*** We are to serve one another!

Listen to Jesus – **The New Commandment (John 13:31-35)** – Also during the last meal of Jesus with his disciples – just before he was betrayed and arrested, he gave them a “new commandment”. Jesus ordered in **John 13:34-35**, ***“And now I give you a new commandment: (agape) love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. If you have love for one another, then everyone will know that you are my disciples.”***

Listening to Jesus and following his teachings, command, and example means our lives are dramatically changed from the world’s way of selfishness and self-centeredness! **Remembering these things, which Jesus told us and many more teachings, let us follow Jesus and live the New Life in Christ with its Self-Giving Agape Love, Forgiveness, and Radical and Extravagant Hospitality.** Let’s continue to listen to the Still Speaking God and to Jesus Christ, the Son of our Divine Parent, Amen.