

Beyond Just Hearing

By Linda Rex

September 1, 2024, Proper 17 / After Pentecost—Have you ever sat listening to someone and realized when they stopped for a breath that you couldn't remember a thing they just said? In that moment, what we wouldn't give for a way to play it all back so we could listen to them again!

The apostle James talks about the importance of attentive listening when it comes to the Word of God. In James 1:17–27, our New Testament reading for this Sunday, the apostle tells us that those who hear the Word but don't act upon what they hear are “hearers who delude themselves.” James wants his readers to understand that what comes out of our mouths is important and should reflect our Lord Jesus Christ. He also emphasizes that we should be swift to hear, but when it comes to anger and speaking, we need to slow down, take our time, and allow these things to be governed by the righteousness of Jesus Christ which is ours in the Spirit.

When we listen, James says we want to filter what we hear through the lens of Jesus Christ and his indwelling presence by the Holy Spirit. When our focus is on ourselves, we tend to see and hear things through a self-directed, self-focused lens. This distorts how we view ourselves and our world. As James says, we become confused, deluded by this inaccurate perception of what we are hearing and seeing. Then, how we speak and what we do becomes motivated by a heart which is focused on self, rather than on the truth which can only be found in Jesus Christ.

When our focus is on Jesus Christ, we begin to see ourselves and our world more accurately. This is because Jesus is the perfect image of his Father, and the only true reflection of God in human flesh. To know who God created you and me to be, we need only look at Jesus, for he is a clear reflection of what it means for a human being to live in right relationship with God and with others in the Spirit. To keep our eyes on the living Word of God, Jesus Christ, is to keep our centre fixed where it belongs. This way, our lens through which we filter all things has great clarity and is a true reflection of what God intended from the beginning.

In Jesus Christ, God has kept his word that he would write his law on our minds and hearts. Forged within his human person, Jesus bears the law written on human minds and hearts, in face-to-face union and communion with his Father in the Spirit. The apostle Paul reminds us to keep our minds on things above and to keep our hearts on things above, for our life is hidden with Christ in God (Col. 3:1–3).

Keeping our focus where it belongs requires having the right perspective about things. I was drawing a picture the other day and a friend suggested that it looked like water, and that I needed to add some fish. When I was done drawing the fish, she said she thought I hadn't drawn the fish correctly. I was certain that I hadn't drawn them incorrectly. In actuality, it was that she and I were looking at the picture from two different perspectives. I had drawn the fish as though I was looking down into the water. She was seeing it as from the side, as when you look into an aquarium. It made perfect sense that she would think I drew the fish incorrectly, because from her point of view—I did.

Do we see ourselves and this world from the Lord's perspective, or do we see them solely from a human perspective? (See Mark 8:31–33.) Where our focus is truly matters, for it impacts how we respond in conversations, how we interact in our encounters with others, and how we handle our relationships. Having a purely human perspective on life, on relationships, and the decisions we are faced with day by day, means that we will hear and see through this lens, thus making us deaf and blind to the truth about ourselves, who we are in Christ and who God has declared us to be—his beloved adopted children. And what we believe about ourselves, the lens through which we view ourselves, impacts how we listen, how we speak, and how we treat those about us. With our

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focus on Jesus Christ and filled with Christ by the Spirit, we live in the truth of who we are, loving God wholeheartedly and loving our neighbor as ourself.

Dear Father, thank you for being our good Creator and Redeemer from whom every good and perfect gift comes. Remind us again about who we are in your Son, Jesus, and fill us anew with your Holy Spirit, that we may not only hear your good Word, but live it out each day, loving you and loving one another as we always were meant to, in Jesus' name, by your Spirit. Amen.

“Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow. In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures. This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God. Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls. But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does. If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is worthless. Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.” James 1:17–27 NASB