

## *Sunday Reflection*

## *How can we engage with God through the senses Sound*

Two interesting things about hearing...!

In our house there are many conversations where I tell Ian all sorts of things about dates in the diary, or things that are happening which, only a few days later, he denies all knowledge of!

And the other interesting thing is that I often really try to listen to the weather forecast and I can listen all the way through, but at the end I still couldn't tell you what the weather is going to be like for the SW!

I think it's entirely possible to listen but not to hear!

We can listen to the words but they make no impact on our minds, our hearts, our consciousness, or even our lives. The words just go over the top of our heads.

And that can be true in a spiritual way too.

We can sit down for our quiet time and read a passage from the Bible but actually we've heard nothing of what it says. Our souls don't engage with the words in front of our eyes.

Just like last week when I spoke about seeing with the eyes of our heart, if we want to hear anything that God is saying to us, we must learn to listen with the ears of our heart. And it's vital that we learn to do that.

In the Parable of the Sower, Jesus calls out to those who are listening,  
*'Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear.'* Lk. 8:8

and then Jesus quotes from Isaiah 6:9  
*'though seeing, they may not see;  
though hearing, they do not understand.'*

Jesus is talking here about what happens when people indulge in idol worship; something which Israel had become so good at.

People become like the idols they worship. In the OT they worshipped gods made of metal and wood; objects without sight or hearing (see Ps 115:2-7). So Jesus is saying here that those who reject the Good News of the NT are like idol worshippers: they can't hear the real message.

But it applies to us too because idols are often good things in themselves but we let them become the ultimate source of meaning for our lives.

And so we see – but we don't see.

We hear – but we don't hear.

Like people who have rejected the Good News we can be deaf to the truth. We too become like the objects we worship and deaf to the words of the true and living God.

When Jesus spoke with the woman at the well, he told her that a time was coming when *'true worshippers will worship in the Spirit and in truth'* (Jn 4:23).

That time arrived with the coming of the Holy Spirit. Now we've got to learn to listen to God through the Spirit within our hearts.

- How good am I at listening to God? Do I create space in my busy day to simply 'be' with Him? I might feel as if I'm in conversation with God all day long, but who's actually doing the talking?
- Am I spending enough time reading His word and giving it the opportunity to challenge me?
- Have I in fact made idols of things that are good within my life – an idol of the way I like to live my life, or even an idol of the way I like to do church, the music we sing, my favourite preacher – so that I can no longer really hear the voice of the Spirit in my soul?

And another thing, I want to suggest that the gift of hearing isn't only about us – about *us hearing* Jesus and having wonderful times of worship in our services.

Hearing is also about *the sound that we make* in other people's ears.

Listen to this passage about the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost from Acts 2:1-4

*When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.*

What must it have been like to hear the arrival of the Holy Spirit like a hurricane-force wind!

This was an event that assaulted all the senses at once.

It was such a noisy occurrence that people gathered from all around to see what was going on.

I know that we love to sing with great gusto but I've never been in a service that was so filled with the presence of the Spirit that people had to rush in from the surrounding streets to find out what was going on!

I think there are two challenges here for us.

First, I notice that in the days leading up to this event, the disciples joined together in constant prayer because they were desperate to know 'what next?' (Acts 1:14).

I wonder how hungry we are to know God's word to us about what next?

How hungry are we to know what next about how we can be church to those around us in the coming weeks and months?

What next about finding the right person to join us here in ministry?

How hungry are we to join together in prayer to hear God speaking?

And the second thing is - we know that following Peter's sermon in Acts 2, about 3,000 were baptized and added to their number *that day!* (2:41).

There was power in Peter's challenge to them. As the people heard the gospel 'they were cut to the heart' (v37).

In Romans 10:17 Paul tells us, *'faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.'*

Well, we, you and I, are the sound of Jesus that goes out into the world. And for many, we're their only contact with Jesus.

Paul tells us that, *'if I could speak all languages of earth and of angels, but didn't love others, I would only be a noisy gong.'* (1 Cor. 13:1)

Without love, our words are just meaningless noise.

Finding the right words to say, the right moment to speak, knowing when to be silent... all these things are tricky but have I given up even trying to speak to others about Jesus?

Do I talk about Jesus in ways that appeal?

Do my words challenge in helpful ways?

Are they spoken in love?

We're coming to the end of our summer series about engaging with God through the senses this week. And I hope that you've enjoyed it as much as I have.

We know without a doubt that we're Christ's witnesses and that we're empowered by the Holy Spirit for that task. I feel that I've learned over these weeks that our witness needs to be a whole-life witness – to all the senses: hearing, taste, sight, feeling, smell.

If we touch others in kindness but our words sound only like an abrasive noise, what does that say about how Jesus is working in our lives? I can bring the fragrance of the love of Jesus, but will it be cancelled out by the bitter flavour I leave in someone's mouth?

I want to close by leaving us with a bit of a challenge; something to think about over the coming days. And I hope that we might all be changed somehow by taking on these challenges...

I hope that they will speak to your soul.

How will I sound today? Am I prepared to give a loving and well thought out, audible explanation of the hope that I have in Christ?

How will I add flavour today? Am I a flavour-enhancer who improves the quality of life for those around me?

How will I look today? Am I conspicuously Christian in the darkness around me, illuminating Jesus to those I meet?

Who can I touch today? Am I the touch of Christ to needy people around me?

How can I leave the aroma of Christ today? Is there a fragrance of the love and life of Jesus Christ in my life that lingers – inviting people to think about eternal realities?

Prayer

*Father, I pray for each one of us today that we would hear you speaking to us, individually and personally. I pray that our hearts would be open towards you, so that we would see you all around us; that we would be the fragrance of Jesus to a dying world; that we would reach out to touch the hurting and the lonely, bringing the healing of Christ; that we would bring the flavour of Christ to all we meet, blessing their lives with the life of Christ.*

*We commit ourselves to you afresh, Living Lord. We commit ourselves to follow where you lead into a world we haven't known before, but to the place you are calling us to and to be the people you are calling us to be. Strengthen our weak knees and tired hands, that our lives will be a song of glory for your name.*

*And a prayer from Lectio 365...*

*'Holy Spirit, revive us again. Come to us once more as you came to that first prayer room in Jerusalem that we might be propelled out of our meetings and on to the streets with new courage to preach the gospel that thousands might encounter the resurrected Saviour, Jesus Christ.' Amen.*

Blessing

### **To know you in all things**

Weave a web of your presence around me today.

Be with my hands as they work.

Be with my eyes as they see.

Be with my ears as they hear.

Be with my tongue as it speaks.

Be with my feelings and my thoughts.

Be with the people I meet.

Be with the things I make.

Be with the decisions I take.

Be in and through,

over and under all,

that doing and hearing and seeing,

speaking and making and being,

I may glimpse your glory,

and hear your voice

and joyfully work with you

to create a new heaven and a new earth.

Amen

