

Gracious God, open our ears that we may hear your truth, open our eyes that we may see your kingdom, and open our hearts and minds that we might know the cries of our brothers and sisters who are hungry, and hurting, and sometimes even dying without the knowledge of your love for them. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts together be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

*Open my ears that I may hear
voices of truth thou senders clear;
And while the wave-notes fall on my ear,
Everything false will disappear.
Silently now I wait for thee,
Ready, my God, thy will to see.
Open my ears, illumine me,
Spirit, divine!*

Our scripture passage this morning begins with an odd proverb. What was Jesus talking about with all of this stuff about the disciple and the master and then the introduction of Beelzebul (literally the “Lord of the Flies” - another name for Satan)? I guess the point that Jesus is making here is to make us consider the question, “who do we listen to?”

Too often, I fear, we only listen to ourselves; that’s the disciple being greater than the master part of the proverb. To listen to a master, an expert, takes humility - which is in short supply these days. And if that self is the head of a house, the leader of a community, and takes on the role of the Lord of the Flies, then the self becomes the center of existence for the whole household, and brokenness results.

Who do you hear? “So have no fear of them.” Who are the *them* that Jesus refers to here? The them who follow Beelzebul, or the them who listen

only to themselves, who acknowledge no master, no expert? Well, yes, both, or any really.

“Have no fear” is one of Jesus’ favorite lines. Have no fear of those who want to diminish your witness. Have no fear of those who tell a different story. Have no fear of those who might oppose or attack you,. Have no fear of *them*. All your energy and respect and awe go to the one who holds you in the palm of the3 hand - the one who holds your soul.

“What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered proclaim from the housetops” (v.27). What you hear, that speaks of the voice of God, in the dark, tell in the light. What could *that* mean? What if, in our context, it means that sometimes God speaks in unlikely places or through unexpected people? That means we must be listening to the world, to the people around us. We need to hear all the people.,, truly hear all of the people. And of course, not everything said speaks of or from God. Do we really need to say that? Maybe we do. There is plenty spoken in our world today that is the antithesis of what God is whispering in our ears and other ears. This isn’t a call to baptize every word spoken. It isn’t a call to claim “it’s all good!” Because it clearly isn’t all good. But there is good being spoken. This is a call to listen and discern. It is a call to listen not merely to react (which seems to be our default these days) but to understand. And when we hear it, when we hear the voice of God in the voice of the people around us, then we proclaim it. Or when we hear a cry from the people that is a call *to* God, then we bring it into the light.

When we hear all the people, we find that God *is* at work. We sometimes think that God only has us. “Our hands are the only hands God has.” While the sentiment is understandable, that idea isn’t the whole truth. God is at work beyond us, above us, around us. Sometimes the call is to catch up to what God

is already doing. And how will we know what God is doing if we don't listen to the people around us?

It isn't easy or comfortable business. Sometimes, because of what we hear, we then cause problems. We make divisions; we call out injustice and oppression. We disturb the status quo. That is the sword that Jesus brought and now hands to us to wield, not to bring violence, not to destroy, but to bring truth and justice to a world sorely lacking both. That is the result of this proclaiming in the light thing.

And notice we aren't permitted to proclaim in the darkness. We don't hint and suggest and whisper.

We shout.

We must be confident in the truth that comes from God. We have to be sure of what we proclaim.

Does it match the God Jesus presents to us? Does it represent the truth that Jesus came to proclaim? Is the sword we wield a sword of our frustration and our anger and our prejudice, or is it the sword of Christ's truth?

We have to be committed to Christ, above all else.

That's a hard word to hear. Above all else. Matthew remembers it this way: "whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me." Whew, a hard word indeed. But what if we understood that to mean first, that it's not a competition. We aren't measuring how much we love and who we love more. Rather, we're realizing that our love for fathers and mothers and anyone is complete only when we love like Christ loved.

That was the command, "love one another, as I have loved you." When we love Christ first, then we are enabled to love others. Accepting Christ's transforming love equips us, transforms us, so that we can love.

All these things of the Spirit take time. We have to grow into this way of loving, this way of being in the world. It doesn't come naturally, It surely doesn't come easily.

We can talk about all sorts of practices that will help us grown in love. But one practice that we can begin right now is to open our ears and *listen*. Listen so that might hear all of the people.

Open my ears, illumine me. Spirit, divine!

Thanks be to God! In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.