

**September 27, 2009  
Matthew 3:13-17  
Speaking Before Listening**

**Much of the world today is based on speaking before listening. There are lots of policies and procedures for speaking in public but none for listening.**

**The following headline caught my attention from the September 20, 2009 New York Times.**

**“Belatedly, Egypt Spots Flaws in Wiping Out Pigs”**

**Apparently the city of Cairo (the largest in the Arabic World) for centuries has relied on herds of roaming pigs to eat the tons of garbage thrown on city streets.**

**Now the litter-strewn metropolis is wrestling with a garbage problem so severe it has commanded the attention of Egypt’s president Hosni Mubarak.**

**What happened? Last spring the Egyptian government heard about the dangers of swine flu.**

**However, they didn’t listen to the full report. The Egyptians thought swine flu was transmitted by pigs. In other words they didn’t get the full report.**

**Swine flu is not transmitted by pigs. Yet President Mubarak ordered that all pigs in Egypt be killed. For centuries those pigs had been eating the tons of garbage thrown out onto the streets.**

**Now the pigs are gone and rotting food piles have drawn massive swarming clouds of flies. The public health conditions are so bad in Cairo that public schools are closing down**

**What started out as an impulsive response to the swine flu threat has turned into a social, environmental and political problem.**

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Today we are bombarded by disembodied voices and background noises. Stereo music and talk shows blare at us in our cars, in our homes, in elevators and in public restrooms.

While we routinely live with all this noise, we remain highly susceptible to the messages shouted by these various voices.

The commercial ads on radio and television pay. They pay the station's bills as we pay for the products they advertise. Some messages carried by music, TV and the internet are of concern.

Is it just a coincidence that randomly vicious violence and hate-filled self-righteousness have become common attitudes in a culture that listens to constant "24/7 late breaking news?"

It is not just people who "hear voices" who are locked away or medicated into a state of suspended reality.

In truth, we all hear voices "from above," and the voices we hear from "above" control our lives, even locking us in "rooms with open doors."

Voices determine what we buy, what we eat, what we expect from others, even what we think about ourselves.

Why isn't God's voice more discernible than all those other shouted sounds? Perhaps our problem is that we only listen to voices that sound like our own.

We have become overly enamored of our own tonal qualities.

The popularity of "dialoging" is not based on giving everyone a chance to listen, but because everyone expects to have an opportunity to speak.

Voices that sound too different - that have a different accent, that speak a different language, which use too large a vocabulary, or ignore basic rules of grammar - too often fall on dumb ears and dull hearts.

Americans have enjoyed a kind of cultural American English for too long.

We insist that everyone speak our languages - English, scientific rationalism, free-market consumerism. These are powerful, persuasive languages.

But in the 21st century we are being called to listen ever more attentively to multilingual voices that are carrying different messages.

God sent Jesus to a multicultural, multi political population. Jesus spoke only Aramaic. Yet Jesus could always discern God's voice among all the dialects he encountered throughout his ministry.

Jesus used a "Galilean model" for evangelization. We need to study the central importance of Galilee to understanding Jesus' ministry and gospel message.

In Jesus' day, Galilee was a cultural crossroads.

Literally meaning a ring or circle, Galilee was a ring of land that encircled peoples of a variety of nations and cultures, with new peoples infiltrating the region all the time.

In its history, Galilee was controlled by Babylon, Persia, Macedonia, Egypt, Syria and Assyria.

In the first century, Galilee, with a population of approximately 350,000 persons, had a large slave element of about 100,000.

God could hardly have chosen a more multicultural context into which to send Jesus of Nazareth.

Galilee is a symbol of the anchoring of biblical faith not in the centers and corridors of power, but in the periphery and margins of the social order.

Jesus' Galilean evangelistic model means that wherever there is the forgotten and voiceless, the lowest level or most marginal of society, there is the base for evangelization.

In an attempt to experience firsthand the world's poor as the "new universal" - seeing global evangelization from the perspective of the poor in Brazil, Haiti, Africa, and the urban ghettos of the United States is needed.

While listening to the vast chorus of sounds God's voice embodies do not forget the horrid conditions of the "Galilees of the world."

Neighborhoods near us that may seem to be too close for our comfort. States like ours that lead the nation in unemployment. Nations like ours where millions have little or no formal education, health care or future.

Too many old shanty towns.  
Too many slums where the world forgets who you are, too many who close their eyes, no time to care; who fail to hear God's voice in a cry such as this.

The Christian is one who listens to God speak before speaking – our Church should be a group of listening people.

Maybe I need to talk about the "Preaching congregation and the listening pastor." It is time to rediscover and recover this biblical tradition of listening before speaking.

Are you listening for God in the midst of all the voices that clamor for your attention everyday?

We can't expect to become skilled all at once at picking out God's voice from the other voices, but perhaps the way to start is as Jesus did: at the moment of baptism - your own or one witnessed today.

Baptism is a commissioning moment.

The church has tried to dress up baptism in sacramental finery, but the reality of the event is more radical than a sanctuary occurrence.

Baptism is no less than our symbolic death to evil, injustice and oppression and rebirth in Christ to righteousness and justice and peace.

At this moment of new beginnings we should listen for Christ's voice introducing us personally to God for the first time: "This is my beloved brother;" and "This is my beloved sister .... I am well-pleased with them and am sending them out with a mission in the world."

For the first 1,000 years of the early Christian Church, the favorite time of baptism was Easter morning.

Baptisms usually took place out-of-doors, in a river or lake. As the new believer stood in the water, the Easter story would be read, after which the new Christian would be immersed.

The bonds of baptism connect us through Christ one to another - it is based in Christ's life, death and resurrection, not some human friendship or warm community.

Through baptism we are truly "one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28).

Baptism should be the event that makes it possible for us all to become multilingual - listening for God, hearing God, in the voices of all God's children.

Amen!

