

SsAM eBlast Reflection January 23, 2022

“Speaking and Listening” by Danny Schweers A Reflection on this Sunday’s Readings: Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10; 1 Corinthians 12:12-31a; Luke 4:14-21, and Psalm 19

Have you heard the heavens talking? Have you listened to what your feet say to your hands? Or what your ears say to your eyes?

This Sunday, when you hear the Bible readings, pay attention to what is said about speaking and listening.

Every speaker wants to find a receptive audience. In Luke we hear that Jesus taught in the synagogues and was praised by everyone. Speakers dream of being praised by everyone. Jesus brought good news to the poor. He proclaimed release to the captives. He proclaimed recovery of sight to the blind. We, as speakers, can do the same in our small way.

In the lesson from Nehemiah, we are told how Ezra spoke aloud the Law of Moses to a crowd gathered at the Water Gate in Jerusalem. This is an audience every preacher, every speaker dreams of finding — “... the ears of all the people were attentive ... all the people wept when they heard the words ...” What speaker does not dream of an audience like that, for their words to make that kind of impact?

Psalm 19 asks us to imagine the heavens talking, that they declare the glory of God and God’s handiwork. Have you listened to the heavens? Days and nights, we are told, talk to each other. Their sound goes out into all lands. Strangely, we are told the heavens have no words or language, that even though their voices are not heard, their message goes to the ends of the world.

Every speaker fears their voice will not be heard, but a stronger fear is that our words will not match the truth we are trying to tell. Every speaker is fallible, so preachers often pray the ending of Psalm 19 before they speak: “Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer.”

We who write and speak want our words to be true. That should be our first priority. If our audience is attentive as well, so much the better! We want them to hear, but there has to be truth for them to hear. If the truth is there, it can go out into all lands, to the ends of the world, even if it is not heard by our audience. If we are speaking, let truth be our first concern.

In Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, the apostle imagines the parts of each person’s body talking and listening to one another. He imagines our feet talking to our hands, our ears talking to our eyes. You and I, Paul tells us, are parts of the body of the church. We are encouraged to talk and listen to one another truthfully. The health of the whole depends on the every part listening to and talking to every other part. If I talk and you listen, then I should listen when you talk. Communication is a kind of shared communion, the glue of community.

You have been listening while I talked. Thank you! Now it is my turn to listen. I am ready to hear what you have to say. Just reply to this email. But first of all, tell me the truth!

--Danny Schweers, Vestry Member