

# Your Servant Is Listening

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     Good morning, everyone. It is a joy to be with you, even though we are not together as we had originally planned. It is great that we have this blessing of being able to join each other through technology.

I want to thank Adrian for making this possible and to all of you for being willing to spend some time with us, whether you join us live here or whether you watch later today.

Thank you for choosing to be with us. Today, I'm just going to offer a brief meditation after a word of scripture, and then we'll close with prayer. And that will suffice for this morning.

So today, our focus is going to be on what your servant is listening. Your servant is listening. A verse that some folks will recognize, especially from the cult of Samuel.

But our lesson today is going to come from the Gospel of John. I'm going to be reading from chapter one, verses 35 through 51. John, chapter one, verses 35 through 51.

[ 1 : 1 1 ]     Of course, if you have prayer request or something that you would like us to be aware of as church family for you, please put that in the chat so that we can keep that covered in prayer.

So for now, let us go to our reading. As I said, John, chapter one, we're reading verses 35 through 51.

The next day, John was standing again with two of his disciples. When he saw Jesus walking along, he said, look, the Lamb of God.

The two disciples heard what he said, and they followed Jesus. Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, what do you want? They said, Rabbi, which means teacher, where are you staying?

Come, he replied, and you will see. So they went and saw where he was staying and spent that day with him. It was about four in the afternoon.

[ 2 : 2 1 ]     Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, we have found the Messiah, that is the Christ, and he brought him to Jesus.

Jesus looked at him and said, you are Simon, son of John. You will be called Cephas, which when translated is Peter. The next day, Jesus decided to leave for Galilee.

Finding Philip, he said to him, follow me. Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. Philip found Nathanael and told him, we have found the one Moses wrote about in the law and about whom the prophets also wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.

Nazareth, can anything good come from there? Nathanael asked. Come and see, said Philip. When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.

How do you know me? Nathanael asked. Jesus answered, I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you. Then Nathanael declared, Rabbi, you are the son of God.

[ 3 : 52 ] You are the king of Israel. Jesus said, you believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You will see greater things than that. He then added, very truly I tell you, you will see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending on the son of man.

So join me for a word of prayer. Loving God, thank you for the gift it is to have this moment in this time. Work in each of us according to what you know we need.

Speak to each heart and each soul as we seek to serve and love you and all those who are born of you. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

Amen. So I know that a lot of times it feels like listening is a lost art today. I mean, many folks probably don't think that there is a whole lot of good listening being done.

I mean, if you have a problem with people listening, you can drop that in the chat or let us know. But I know that sometimes it feels really hard to feel like someone has heard what you've had to say, really will connect with you on an emotional level.

[ 5 : 03 ] They will empathize with you. And not only do they feel what you say and understand what you say, but they also respond appropriately to what you say.

And those would be probably the best measures of whether or not people are listening well. What's funny about that is while many of us will lament the state of listening in our lives, that the real question I think that that should demand of each of us is how good a listener are we being, right?

That it's one thing to hope that people will listen to us, but it also would then imply that we should be offering that same listening to others. And as we talk about listening, especially listening in 2024, I want us to talk about who we listen to.

You know, with social media, there is this thing that has happened to us over time, where there are these folks that we call influencers in the world.

And I found that fascinating, that there are these folks who just have these kinds of audiences and this ability to impact things.

[ 6 : 17 ] And these are folks we call influencers. And so if you've not heard of influencers or if you're not really aware of them, here's a way to understand that. According to a couple of sources, on January 1st, the social media platform TikTok had 106,000 people they called influencers.

106,000. Last year, Instagram, a different social media platform, had 177,000 people they called influencers.

Now, in order to be an influencer, it depends on how big your audience is. For TikTok, they start at if you have 1,000 followers. That's the minimum.

If you have 1,000 followers, that's one thing. But then you could have any number of followers on top of that. And just to let you know, on TikTok itself, that there are 39,000 accounts that have more than a million followers.

39,000 people have that kind of impact in our society. And that's 6,200 more than YouTube and nearly 16,000 more than Instagram.

[ 7 : 28 ] So there is a lot of power that comes with this kind of influence. Now, the reason why I say that, going back to my original point, is there are people who are choosing to listen to these people.

That are giving them this kind of impact, this kind of power in their lives. And that gets back to the question we're talking about, is who are we choosing to listen to? Right?

While we hope that others will listen to us, we also have to admit that we open our hearts, we open our minds to others. And who do we choose to give that kind of influence in our lives?

Friends, when you think about that, whether you're on social media or not, there are clearly influencers in your life. There are those folks you have chosen to give power to.

Power in the sense that their opinions matter to you. That when they speak, you put more credence to what it is they share, to what it is they have to say.

[ 8 : 39 ] And so whether they carry the title of influencer from social media or not, there are influencers in your life. Now, hopefully, there are people you love who undoubtedly have that impact on your life.

But there are others. You know, when you think of perhaps a news program that you listen to, when you think of the radio show you may listen to in the car on the way to work, when you think of newspaper columnists or others you may read, there are folks who give you who have influence.

So. For us as disciples. Who in your life has influence that is pointing you toward and helping you grow as a disciple of Jesus?

Because when we consider that there are a lot of different voices that we put some stock in in our lives, hopefully some of that is at least about your faith.

Some of that should at least be about who you are as a disciple of Jesus. Now, in today's reading, we see people who do that for each other.

[ 9 : 55 ] And I want us to walk through this story because we see people pointing to Jesus and then Jesus impacting and influencing people.

And we get multiple examples in the passage that we read before us. So if you're following along, let's go back to John chapter one and starting at verse thirty five, where we come into the story and John the Baptist is talking to the people who follow him, his group of disciples and Jesus passes by and he points and says, look, the Lamb of God.

He's literally pointing out that there is the person we need to be paying attention to. There is the savior of the world. And two disciples, one of whom we know is Andrew.

There is some debate about who the second one was, but one of them know what he would be. They then go and choose to follow Jesus.

So in that sense, John is influencing them. That he is pointing them to the truth. He is pointing them to Jesus himself.

[ 11 : 05 ] And then they, these two disciples, have an interaction with Jesus and Jesus has an impact on them. That question, what are you looking for?

What do you want? Hits on a deeper level for everyone. Jesus asked it. Are you simply looking to hang out? Are you simply looking for a place to stay?

What is it you are hoping I will do for you? When Jesus reaches into each of our lives, that question has very meaningful impact. And we all know that. And so, again, we as people, who are you listening to?

Because other disciples in this particular episode, I mean, because that's the implication here, right? Two responded and went to follow Jesus. But what about the others?

And we have to think about who do we ignore and who do we listen to? Continuing on in the story, we get down to Andrew and his interaction with his brother.

[ 12 : 09 ] Because Andrew has this interaction with Jesus and he is profoundly changed. He runs and gets Simon, who we will subsequently know as Peter, and tells him, we found the one.

We found the Messiah and brings him to Jesus. And, of course, Jesus interacts with Peter and changes his name. And we know how significant a thing that is.

That when Jesus says, we are going to see you differently now. When God says, I know who you were, but this is who I know you will become. And so you get a new name going forward. That is a powerful thing.

And again, there is someone who points a person to Jesus. And Jesus comes in and has profound effect on them.

Keep going in the story. And then we have Philip dealing with Nathaniel. And Philip draws Nathaniel to him. And then there is, of course, resistance at first.

[ 13 : 09 ] Nathaniel is, can anything good come from Nazareth? So, of course, people will have their back and forth. Of course, people will hesitate. But eventually, Nathaniel does choose to go.

That invitation, come and see. And he chooses to do exactly that, to go and see. And, of course, when he gets there, Jesus impacts Nathaniel right away.

Here is a person in whom there is no deceit. Here is a person in whom that doesn't have an underlying agenda. Here is a person that's not in it for himself. They want to discover the truth of God. That what Nathaniel realizes out of the gate is that Jesus understands me.

Jesus sees something that nobody else sees. And that's true for all of us when we interact with Jesus. And Jesus reassures him that you are going to see something even greater.

How powerful is that for you? How well does your journey mirror the experiences we are talking about? Has someone guided you, pointed you toward Jesus?

[ 14 : 15 ] And then, when you have your own experience with Jesus, do you respond? Are you listening?

See, because that's really our point. You know, in our own lives, with all the people around us and with all the people whom we give some power in to influence us.

My question for us today, and I hope that we will all consider this, is are there people around you who are influencing you in a way that continues to point you toward Jesus?

And where in your life do they rank in terms of people who are influencing you in a way that continues to do this?

Are we listening for those messages? Not only are we listening to them as people, but are we listening for the spirit working through them to help us get closer to God?

[ 15 : 38 ] Because when I talk to people, and even in my own experience, our hearts are yearning for that closeness. Our hearts are yearning for that next step. Our hearts are thirsting for more and more of what God only can give.

But you have to work for it. You have to listen for it. You have to be paying attention to what God is saying. Here's the next thing. And if we're not open, if we are distracted, if we are caring more about other things than what God is bringing to the table, then why are we surprised that we either feel stuck or feel like things aren't happening?

See, that's really what I want us to consider today. You know, are you desiring what might be next for you from God?

Are you open in your spirit to say, God, lead me, love me, take me to the next thing, take me to the next place, draw me closer to you?

And if that is where you find yourself today, whether it's because there is a crisis or there is a problem or there is a challenge you are facing, maybe it's because you are in a particular place that you've discovered Jesus.

[ 16 : 57 ] You love Jesus and you just want to see more of what God has in store. But that's all about you wanting more from Jesus, you hoping for more in this relationship.

And I hope that's where we all find ourselves is longing and yearning for more because only God can grant that. So in terms of how we deal with this, how we might move forward, I'm hoping that each of you will consider the folk in your life who are those people.

And if you look around your life and find yourself without friends who are offering you those things, I would encourage you to find Christian friends of that type.

You know, we can call them different things. You can call them covenant groups. It can just be one or two people who you have relationships with on your own. But in the Methodist tradition, having that group of people who provide you a safe space where you can explore things of God, you can process what's happening in your world right now.

And you can ask hard questions and they will help you understand what God might be saying or doing. Friends who will give you good examples of faithful living.

[ 18 : 22 ] People out here trying to do the right things. The same way you're trying to do the right things. People who you can look at and say, yeah, you know, we know we're not perfect, but I see in this person an example of faithful living that can help me.

And not only that, and this is the piece that many of us run from, is folks who will give you loving but meaningful accountability. People who will say to you, I know you can do better than that.

Or people say, you know, we've been talking about taking the step for a long time and you still haven't done it yet. What is what's holding you back? People with whom you can confess, you know, I messed up.

And we'll love you through it. Because if we're not providing that for one another, we shouldn't be surprised that we get stuck.

That we're not taking the steps that we hope to take, that we're not growing the ways we hope to grow. But having those folks, just like we see in the story, in the scripture reading for today.

[ 19 : 33 ] Folks who will say, hey, there is something powerful happening over here in this man. You need to come and see this. This is the one. Who's your friend like that?

Who are you a friend like that to? That's really critical. And not only that, are you listening for those invitations from God?

Are you open to being led like that? Because that's how we discover our next step. That's how we move into places and opportunities to grow.

So with that in mind, I'm hoping that today, that in your prayer and in your conversation with God, that as you seek your next step, as you seek greater closeness with God, as you seek greater faithfulness in your life, that you will be led by God to who those people might be for you.

I also want to say that on this weekend, you know, we see a powerful example of listening to God and responding to the call of God on your life.

[ 20 : 53 ] And of course, Dr. King. Martin Luther King's life was extraordinary in many ways for its impact on our walk for justice.

But we must remember that it started with faith for him. It started with how he understood Christ to be at work.

And he could have stepped back from the invitation to move into a leadership role. He could have compromised the call on his heart to love and lead with love and remain nonviolent in the face of the white supremacist segregation he was facing.

And he saw in our nation. He could have decided to do things differently. But God put on him and he had people around him that responded to a particular kind of call.

And he stepped into that leadership and we are all blessed and better for it. Remember, he got criticized from each side. People who insisted that he wasn't doing enough.

[ 21 : 59 ] People who wanted him to change his compromise, his principles. People who insisted that even he was being too radical. You know, for those of you who will hear so many comments and quotes from Dr. King this weekend, let's remember that Dr. King's life doesn't end on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in 1963.

While the I Have a Dream speech is powerful and extraordinary, there is so much more that happens in his life after that point. And if you really want to see why when Dr. King was assassinated, he was so hated because he was hated at that point.

It's because he was pushing for a vision of justice in America that made many people uncomfortable. And working to make that vision real, had a dynamic plan for poverty, wanted people to give up racism and segregation in ways that were far more substantive than people were comfortable with.

And so he was getting it from every side because for some it wasn't radical enough. And for others, it was far too radical to be comfortable. The key here is that that's what happens when you listen to the spirit in your life.

It doesn't make things easy. It just draws you closer and keeps you faithful. And I hope that you, all of you who are listening today, will come at life with that similar love for Christ and willingness to be led and to listen.

[ 23 : 40 ] Because if you call on Christ to speak, he will. The question is, will we be listening when he does? Those radical transformations that we see in Peter and Andrew, the other disciple and Nathaniel and Philip happened because Christ spoke to their souls.

When you look at the ways in the spirit of God, when you look at the ways in which you long for wisdom, when you look at the ways in which you long for closeness with God, all you have to do is what Samuel did.

Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening. And be ready to respond when he does. Amen and amen. Friends, as we come to a time of praying together, I hope that you will share some of the things that are on your hearts.

Of course, we know that we have many people around us who are struggling in the midst of this storm. This one, it's so different for different parts of our community.

There are those among us who probably haven't seen very much and haven't felt very much of the wind. And there are others who are in whiteout conditions and snow is blowing around. So no matter how you experience things today, no matter what may be happening in your world, let us be in prayer for each other as we make our way through these challenging times.

[ 25 : 12 ] Of course, we know of people who are ill. We are aware of people who are grieving and we keep them covered in prayer as well. So I invite you to unite your heart with mine as we come before God together.

Loving God, on this day, we are mindful of the depth of your love for us. How you are proactive and reach out to continue to lead. The ways in which you continue to pour yourself into us so that we might walk the path you would have us walk.

Loving God, we know that you hold us tenderly. But you ask bold and courageous things of us.

Things that require us to trust you in deep and complete ways. That we have to walk in places that are not comfortable. To do things that are not easy for us.

But best of all, you are with us in those difficult times, in those moments. And we know that the closeness, the hope, the blessing, the peace, the joy are on the other side of that faithful following.

[ 26 : 22 ] Speak to us, Lord. We know that you have the answers to all our questions. That your plan for us is good and perfect. No matter what it is our desires may be, let us always be willing to lead, to yield to you.

Your will be done in our lives. For those around us, Lord, let us keep our eyes and hearts open. That if we find those who are struggling in the midst of this storm, that we are ready to respond in real ways with Christian love.

Let us keep our eyes and hearts open for those among us who are sick and need help. For those who are grieving and need comfort. For those who are confused and seeking direction.

For those who are alone and feel that there is no love. Let us indeed be your hands and feet. Let us indeed be vessels for your words. So that people will discover you as we have talked about.

Let us be those who point to you. So that those who do not understand will be drawn closer. Lord God, for all in our lives.

[ 27 : 32 ] For the ways in which you have provided for us. For the ways in which you have nurtured us. For the ways in which you have cared for us. We give you thanks. So much would be easy to overlook.

So much can be easily lost. Forgive us when we miss those small signs from you. That let us know you are there. And Lord, as we go about the rest of our day.

Let us be mindful of your presence. And let us keep listening for your voice. No matter how you choose to reveal yourself to us. In Jesus' most holy name we pray and ask.

Amen. So just sharing a few things with everyone. Of course, be mindful of the fact that we have our Bible studies coming up. Our small group ministry is underway.

And getting started. If you did not sign up for a group. You can still reach out through the church website. Or you can contact the office or me directly. And get into a group if you are still hoping to do so.

[ 28 : 39 ] The His Only Son Bible study is still meeting on Thursdays. Even if you have not been part of previous conversations. You are welcome to join us.

We also, I'm springing this on Adrian. He doesn't know about this. But we also have a small group that is interested in going to see the premiere of The Chosen. Which will be on February 2nd or 3rd.

So if you are interested in that. Feel free to email me or contact me directly. I also know that Pastor Jennifer is still looking for folks to help with the concession stand tomorrow.

If you are able to do that. Please contact her directly. So that we can have enough people there to help tomorrow. Adrian did put up about the ministry fair that is coming next week.

So if you are on a ministry team at the church. Make sure that your team is planning to be there. And is ready for it with a table.

[ 29 : 41 ] I see a prayer coming in from Nancy. About her dad. That her dad fell. And separated his shoulder.

We know that Nancy's father has been having multiple challenges. And so we want to keep him. And of course Nancy and the family covered as well. So all that having been said. There is a lot happening of course in our shared ministry together.

And I thank you all for your time and attention. And I pray that God will move in your life in ways that are radical and wonderful. And you will know that love firsthand.

So that said friends. Let us continue to take care of each other. Especially during these challenging weather times. And I look forward to the next time we can see each other in person or online.

God bless you. And we'll be in touch soon.