

Scripture and Sermon for November 22, 2015

Psalm 132:1-12 [13-18]

O God, remember in David's favor
all the hardships he endured;

how David swore to God
and vowed to the Mighty One of Jacob,

"I will not enter my house
or get into my bed;
I will not give sleep to my eyes
or slumber to my eyelids,

"until I find a place for God,
a dwelling place for the Mighty One of Jacob."

We heard of it in Ephrathah;
we found it in the fields of Jaar.

"Let us go to God's dwelling place;
let us worship at God's footstool."

Rise up, O God, and go to your resting place,
you and the ark of your might.

Let your priests be clothed with righteousness,
and let your faithful shout for joy.

For your servant David's sake
do not turn away the face of your anointed one.

God swore to David a sure oath
and will not turn back on it:
"One of the offspring of your body
I will set on your throne.

"If your offspring keep my covenant
and my decrees that I shall teach them,
their offspring also shall sit on your
throne forevermore."

[For God has chosen Zion;
God has desired it for a habitation:

"This is my resting place forever;
here I will reside, for I have desired it.

"I will abundantly bless its provisions;
I will satisfy its poor with bread.

"Its priests I will clothe with salvation,
and its faithful will shout for joy.

"There I will cause a horn
to sprout up for David;
I have prepared a lamp
for my anointed one.

"whose enemies I will clothe with disgrace,
but upon my anointed a crown will gleam."]

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

John 18:33-37

Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered, "Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?" Pilate replied, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?" Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here." Pilate asked him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice."

Let us pray...Amen.

My brother and I were raised in North Haven, Ct. We grew up in the 60's and 70's, and I'd have to say it was a pretty nice childhood. We lived at the end of a cul de sac, which meant that there was not a lot of traffic at our end of the street.

When we were younger, we would play in the yard, or in a neighbor's yard. But as we got older, we would play further away from our house.

In the Spring, there was basketball or tag, in the Summer, there was whiffle ball, kick ball, there was the river out back with frogs, turtles, salamanders, and tree forts, roller skating in the driveway or on the sidewalk, in the Fall there was tag or tackle football, playing in leaf piles, in the Winter there was building snow forts, snow ball fights, sledding, and if there was no snow, basketball again.

The street was our playing field, but it was right out front of our house. And as my brother and I got older, we began to realize that the further we played from our house, the harder it was to hear my mom call when it was time to go in.

When we were younger, we would be called for supper, and then we were in for the night. But as we aged, we would eat, and then go back outside again. It seems like we spent a whole lot more time outside than kids do these days....but maybe that's just my impression.

When we were older, we would stay out until we absolutely had to go in. But here's the thing: if we couldn't hear my mom call for us to go in, we didn't have to in right away.

Of course, after the first few times of saying, 'we didn't hear you', my mom figured out that some new rules were in order, and so began the challenge

of my brother and I to distance ourselves from my mom's calling voice, and my mom's efforts to keep us close enough to hear her voice calling!

Maybe it was like that in your family, maybe not. But in ours, as soon as a new rule was implemented, the challenge was on to figure out how to circumvent it!

Of course, by the time we were in high school, able to drive, and going to our part-time jobs, it wasn't a literal challenge any more. We knew what our parents expected of us: respect, politeness, attention to the curfews that were in place for our own protection and safety...

We may not have been able to hear our parent's voices, but we knew what they were calling out to us.

This was true when I went to the beach with my friends, and when I went to college in Ohio, and when my brother went to NY City with his friends, or went to Clarkson for college.

It was true when I went to India to study abroad for part of my sophomore year: just because you have put yourself far enough to no longer hear the voice calling, doesn't mean you don't have to listen or obey.

Our Gospel lesson this morning is a relatively familiar passage often used during Lent: an exchange between Jesus and Pontius Pilate, over whether Jesus is a King. Here's something that jumped out at me when I was reading our passage: "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice."

Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.

Doesn't it seem like the world has figured out a way to play far enough away from home that it doesn't have to hear the voice of Jesus anymore?

Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.

So if we don't listen to the voice of Jesus anymore, do we still belong to the truth? If we don't listen to the voice of Jesus, to what do we belong?

It's not like we don't know what he's calling us to, right? Most of us have heard enough scripture to know what Jesus is calling about. Even if we only paid attention around Christmas and Easter, we would get the idea that Jesus calls us to be ambassadors of peace and forgiveness, to be his hands and feet and ears and to love others as he has love us.

So why do we pretend to be playing too far away from him to hear his voice? We do we think that we can ignore his call, his expectation that we behave in a way that would make him proud? Why do we think we can worship on Sunday with prayer and song and the Word of God, and cheer on popular cultural leaders espousing hatred and meanness and bitterness on Monday?

If we thought Jesus wept with the news of his friend Lazarus's death, think how he weeps today...that so many who profess to be his followers have moved so far away that they couldn't listen to his voice if they wanted to. Couldn't belong to the truth if they wanted to.

Just like my brother and I knew, *knew* that our parents would be calling us to come in when it began to get dark, and yet, intentionally played outside the limits of their voices, we know, *we know* what Jesus is calling us to do, and yet we live just outside the limit so that we can't always hear his voice.

If we have even a passing knowledge of what Jesus expects of us as his followers, then we know what he wants from us concerning the hungry, the naked, the thirsty, the incarcerated, the hospitalized, the immigrant.

Look, my brother and I may have pushed the boundaries, may have wanted to say out later than our parents wanted us to, but we still went home at dinner time. We still sat down and ate with our parents, we still stayed mostly within our curfews...

But when I read a newspaper, listen to radio program, watch tv, surf the internet, I see less and less evidence that anyone in charge, or anyone who hopes to be in charge, even remotely cares about the truth, or the hungry, or the naked, or anybody else in need. Apparently, according to these voices, those in need are a problem. Or *the* problem. Or at least, they are a part of the problem. Even though the one we follow, the one whose voice we profess to listen for and to, said we will always have the poor...

So help me out here. I'm confused. No surprise there. Where is the disconnect? Where is the breakdown between what we know Jesus is calling us to do, and what we actually do? Where is the disconnect between the truth we know to be from Jesus, and the truth we tell ourselves to justify letting the world go on as it is?

Is it because we feel powerless? Is it because we are overwhelmed with the way the world has turned, and feel like there is nothing we can do about it?

Because we have a lot more power than we realize. No matter what happens in the world, we have the power to forgive. No matter what happens in the world, we have the power to be generous. No matter what happens in the world, we have the power to heal. And no matter what happens in the world, we have the power to reject the evil, and embrace the love. It really is as simple as that!

Jesus, and his ragged band of followers, stood up to the Roman Empire, the Greek civilization, and the established leaders of their own faith. Jesus alone stood up to death itself. And won. Won over death with love, won

over political power with grace, won over religious power with forgiveness. With God's help, Jesus won. And with God's help, we will too. If only we would listen for his voice, listen *to* his voice, Jesus will tell us what to do, tells us what to do in scripture, whenever we care to hear it.

There is a disconnect between what we know Jesus is calling us to do, and what we actually do. Maybe not you and me, but our culture, our society, our world. Maybe it's time that we start holding others accountable for listening to truth, for listening to the voice of love.

Maybe it's time to start holding our leaders accountable to a standard that is universal in its hope for peace, in its hope for justice, in its hope for righteousness that isn't self-righteous...we know what that voice sounds like. It sounds like truth. Let's listen for a while, shall we? Amen.