

The Rev. Jakki R. Flanagan
St. Thomas's Episcopal Church
February 26, 2017
Last Sunday after Epiphany, Year A
Exodus 24:12-18
Psalm 99
2 Peter 1:16-21
Matthew 17:1-9

Lent begins this week. Ash Wednesday is already *this Wednesday*. It's mid-boggling to think we're already at this point.

I'm not much of a "giver upper" for Lent.

I know that's more "traditional" to find something you love and deny yourself of it for these 40 days...it's all very sacrificial and thus in many minds, holy, but honestly it makes me feel more like a recalcitrant child than a thoughtful disciple.

What helps me be more intentional is when I have to take something on.
Contemplating what that will be... how to apply it... wondering what will come from it, at the surface level, and perhaps a level or two below that...
I've been pondering... what it would mean to have a Lenten discipline of Listening??

Or perhaps a Lenten discipline that's just the opposite of Listening??

I'm not even sure what that would look like, but can imagine some possibilities...

Knock, knock.

Who's there?

The interrupting sheep.

The interrupting she...

Baaaaa! You get it?

This joke is an excerpt from the closing credits of a show called the *The Vicar of Dibley*. It's a BBC show about a tiny Anglican congregation in an English village. There's a small regular cast, of quirky and imperfect people, two of which are: the Vicar, and Alice, her determined acolyte... And the Vicar and Alice share this joke at the end of one episode.

The Vicar is telling the joke, Alice is responding. Let me continue the scene:

I'll lean left for the Vicar, and right for Alice.

So, the Vicar tells the joke and the scene continues,
The Vicar asks Do "You get it???"

Alice states:

[Alice] "No, sorry, 'cause I hadn't finished my bit. Do it again, and..."

[Vicar]: "No, that's the joke, you see. The interrupting sheep always interrupts people. See?"

[Alice]: "And that's funny?"

[Vicar]: "Yes. It's hilarious."

Alice... dear, dear Alice...

She is dedicated, spends a lot of time following Jesus, (well, often in the show, the Vicar), is deeply loyal, works hard, and yet, *at times*, despite her sincere efforts... doesn't get it...in this joke and elsewhere.

Alice could be a modern day, gentler version, of Jesus's disciple, Peter.

One of the things worth noting about this show, *The Vicar of Dibley* is that their "Peter/Alice Moments" are viewed more kindly, as if to acknowledge we will all get our chance, to be Peter.

In today's Gospel Peter doesn't get it, and by some counts he missed getting it a few times. First there's what happened with Jesus, right before Peter's very eyes... Jesus's stunning change, his face "shone like the sun" and Peter says nothing, didn't even comment on it, not that he knew in that moment that this would later come to be known as Transfiguration Sunday – but still... we hear in the Gospel,

Jesus:

"was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. Then Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."

Peter had the opportunity to listen.

Not only did he have a chance to listen but he had the opportunity **to eavesdrop on Moses, Jesus, and Elijah!** Imagine that conversation!

It would be like amazing, perhaps like getting to eavesdrop on **Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, and Eleanor Roosevelt!!**

But instead of listening, he just kept talking.

It's like Peter couldn't help himself, he just started blathering. Perhaps he was nervous, I don't know but then we hear that, while Peter was still speaking:

"... suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!"

One could think that even God lost patience with Peter's rambling!

God noticed that Peter wasn't paying attention, or perhaps more accurately, that Peter wasn't paying attention to the right things.

So God, did the unthinkable... at least in polite Episcopal society, God... **interrupted.**

Perhaps we need to transfigure our ideas of listening and interrupting.

Listening...the Holy Work of *Listening*.

It isn't simply *not talking*, though clearly, that's part of it.

Truly listening is an action... not an absence.

It involves listening to what is being said, and for what is not.

It involves actively allowing for silence, protecting it almost, so that thoughts, hopes, fears, and pain may rise to the surface, perhaps even find breath.

Truly listening transforms the ordinary into the sacred.

Listening to a neighbor or colleague share their experience of discrimination.

Listening to an oppressed group demand what they need.

Listening to the fear, pain, and anguish all around us...even if it's almost too much to bear.

Today we also hear the Holy Work of *Interrupting*.

It is not simply an action of the impolite but also of **the courageously defiant!**

It involves seizing the moment of calling out the unacceptable.

Changing the dynamic, Forcing the shift in perspective

Shining a light on the injustice of the status quo.

There are times when it is Holy work to interrupt. Apparently God thought so in today's Gospel.

And what about for us today – where do we interrupt:

When a trans person is being accosted by someone for using a certain bathroom.

When racist, or ableist, or misogynist, or anti-semitic, or sizeist, or anti-immigrant, or islamaphobic, or homophobic, or anti-queer, statements are being said in our presence.

When the Administration of this country attempts to **destroy the Freedom of the Press!**

These and many others... are times of Holy Interruption.

And how to know when to do which when it feels less clear.

Perhaps we need more practice...to do more of both, which on the surface could seem impossible.

Yet we are Episcopalians... and as such, are a people of the *both/and*, rather than *either/or*.

A people of the already and the not yet.

We can both listen more...and interrupt more.

Sometimes the choice may be scary. We may feel overwhelmed by it all or even embarrassed at misunderstanding, getting it wrong, like Peter did,
....or may be we are afraid...

of what we must hear,
or of what we must say

We won't always get it right... living in this tension of Holy Listening and Holy Interrupting.

We would do well to remember that we are not alone.

We are never doing this on our own.

So we come to this church on Sundays to be reminded of that.

To be with each other and to remind each other of our faith, our convictions, of our love.

We come to this place and to this table...as today's Epistle reminds us:

"So we have the prophetic message more fully confirmed. You will do well to be attentive to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts."

Until we are transfigured...not once, **but over and over and over.**

We hear today God's voice from the cloud, imploring the disciples to listen...listen.... please listen to my beloved son, Jesus.

And then Jesus reminds us,
the disciples of today...
as he reminded those disciples from long ago,
not only in word but also deed

“Jesus came and touched them,”

He touched them

“saying, “Get up and do not be afraid.”

May we continue to hear these voices, in the clouds and here on earth to help us.

And may we remember, as we hear an excerpt from our Morning Prayers, over and over, that we are God’s,
“and we are the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand...”ⁱ

Knock... knock...

ⁱ An excerpt from Morning Prayer, from the Venite (aka a portion of Psalm 95:1-7)

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