

04/24/2016 - Fifth Sunday of Easter

“Red Teaming the Soul” - Rev Seth D. Jones ©

Scripture: 1 John 4:2-12; *John 10:22-30; 13:34-35*

Jesus today speaks from the Portico of Solomon and what he says is not all that plain, even though he has been asked to speak plainly. But the problem is not that he is not speaking plainly, it is that the people are not listening. Our inability to listen is a constant problem and just because we follow Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior does not mean we suddenly are able to listen well. Far more people are able to speak about their religion and make sure you hear them. I have come to believe, though, that being a follower of Jesus in this day and age means far more of us should learn to listen deeply and closely *for the presence of Jesus* in others and the world, rather than speaking.

One of the most surprising ways of “deep listening” comes from the US Army. At the requests of generals who were concerned that they were repeating ineffective patterns and processes, a team of very smart people developed the idea of Red Teaming, which has been adopted throughout the military and now in many corporate arenas.

Red Teaming is the act of gathering together a team from many sources for a single or ongoing situation. The team is from all levels of the organization and the members of the chosen team are given the authority to directly challenge leadership in order to help see through bias and blocks in planning. A Red Team is trained with the handbook, which provides ways to see through personal biases and experience, cultural biases and Westernized thinking patterns, logical fallacies, and group-think. This is the US Military that advocates this. The Red Team sits down with the mission critical team and breaks everything down, not to get answers, but to help those present to see through their biases and cultural blocks, so they can plan beyond set patterns.

Red Teaming is designed to confront places in the person, group, and organization that have developed ingrained attitudes and views that do not allow for new people or ways, to dismantle false worldviews which allow us to maintain ways of doing things for our own benefit, to deconstruct logical fallacies that have justified behaviors or complacency in thinking and action, to dissolve the desires of a particular group to reinforce their thinking in order to maintain power and control, and to create a foundation for clear planning and decision making.

That means, if you are the person or the head of an organization who has called a Red Team together, you have to sit there and take it. The Applied Critical Thinking Handbook has many pages devoted to creating a safe place for a Red Team to make this happen. Red Teaming recognizes organizations are made up of people and an organization relies on trust to function well.

It is this sense of the dignity of others that allows us to see how Red Teaming applies to our spiritual lives. Red Teaming creates an atmosphere of “deep listening”. It is only by listening deeply to others and the world around us that we can speak plainly. St. Francis of Assisi presented this radical shift in our attention to the world and others in his great prayer:

O Lord, make me an instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy.
*O, Divine Master, grant that I may **not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love;***

St. Francis recognizes in his great prayer that the position of the one who loves God and Jesus is one of listening, understanding and caring. The position of St. Francis is doing whatever is possible to fulfill Jesus' commandment:

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. (John 13:34-35)

We may be outside the Portico of Solomon with those who are arguing with Jesus and refusing to listen closely, but maybe, just maybe, we will have a moment of clarity where we realize making sure everyone hears our personal perspective and getting them to fulfill my needs is not a Godly way. It may be that, in such a moment, we see where we stand in relation to God, and realize, as the Puritans used to say, "*we are humbled before the Lord*". We realize in this place, which we share with St. Francis, that deep listening - consoling others, understanding others - is all about love. Anything else, as Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 13, is a noisy gong and clanging cymbals. We gain nothing whatsoever if our relationship with God and others isn't about love.

Now, and only in such a place, are we able to begin Red Teaming the Soul; only out of love, as followers of Jesus, are we able to do Deep Listening.

One of the best ways of learning to "Deep Listen" is a relational approach that comes from the Quaker tradition, and I want to share this with you today.

I found this on a blog site by a gentleman named Micah Bales¹, who presents a classic Quaker four-step approach to deep listening. Remember, what we are seeking to do with deep listening is to confront our bias and worldviews in order to make room for the presence of God and Christ in our lives, to follow more closely the Shepherd who calls our name. We are putting ourselves in the position to be confronted with the presence of Jesus, and we are learning to hear what Jesus is saying. We are opening ourselves to God's love.

The **first step** to Deep Listening in this Quaker approach is to seek "*Jesus Without*". We go outside of ourselves to look for the presence of Christ. The primary place to do this is in Scripture, to daily expose one's self to the Word of God. In order to deeply listen to Scripture, we have to reverse the way we normally read the Book. Most often, people read Scripture to find what they are looking for - an answer to a question, a verse that confirms a particular view they have of someone else or a political policy, say. But deeply listening to Scripture demands that we read Scripture as if we are the book being read, as if Scripture is reading us, as if God is speaking

¹ From <http://www.micahbales.com/missional-quaker-faith-deep-listening/>.

to us from the pages. Scripture, Jesus, becomes a commentary on the state of our soul, our being. The stories, parables, poems, and words point us to the love of God, if we are willing to listen and be read by Scripture. This is why this first step is called "*Jesus Without*".

The **second step** to Deep Listening is to seek "*Jesus Within*". We go within ourselves to seek the presence of Christ and God when we pray, when we sit in silence with the Lord. Many of us are not comfortable with silence, with the blank slate of self staring back at us when we are deliberately silent. But Deep Listening requires that we develop a taste for silence. Most often, prayer is an act of asking God for things, either for ourselves or for other people. There is nothing wrong with this - it is just limited. Our prayer time becomes a one-way conversation to God. We speak *to God*, and then are done. Listening *for God* means making space to listen deeply. Listening for Jesus in silence means being able to tolerate silence as one of the great, if not the greatest, vehicle for God to make God's love and presence known to us. Seeking *Jesus within* means we might see parts of ourselves we might not want to see. But if we can begin to trust silence and be in the presence of silence, we will realize that Jesus is within *with us*.

The **third step** to Deep Listening is to seek "*Jesus In the Midst*". This means whenever we gather together in worship, we are seeking the presence of Christ among us, just as Jesus promised when he said, "*Wherever two or three of you gather in my Name, I am there in their midst*" (Matt 18:20). In worship, we gather to praise the Lord for all the Lord has done for us, for calling us together as his flock, so that we might be shepherded by the Good Shepherd. This is our sheep pen, if you will. When we are deeply listening in worship, one of the great blocks to becoming aware of Jesus among us is how we see the church.

We will be talking about this more in May, but for now I ask, is worship where we are simply seeking confirmation of our religious and spiritual bias and worldview, making sure we are who we think we are; or is worship the place where we allow God to form us into the people God wishes us to be? We can only truly be transformed and changed by God when we are listening deeply for Christ in our midst. Our sheep pen here is a little like a training ground for learning to love in the way of Christ. In worship, we learn to pray for one another, we learn to praise God and thus praise one another, we learn to teach and speak out of love to one another. But we need to see it as possible, and that means seeing "church" differently, which means as a gathered body of Jesus Christ's followers, we must be willing to deeply listen so we can actually allow Jesus into our midst.

And **fourth**, Deep Listening is the act of seeking "*Jesus as Stranger*". What are we looking for when we are with other people in the community, people who are not of like mind as us? In Maine, if you know 100 people, you can assume that only 12-15 of those people have any idea what we are about and up to on Sunday mornings. Or are all your relationships with people who think the way you do? When we speak of Jesus as a stranger, we are really saying we are seeking the presence of God and Christ in people who are not like us. It is a question of how we will be in relationship with other people *out there*.

Deep listening demands that, in particular with other people, we find ways to break up and break down our particular worldview and influences from our past. If you are wondering how to be a follower of Christ who draws others to God and Christ, do what Jesus tells us today.

We, those who gather in Jesus' name week after week, are the ones who listen for the voice of the Shepherd who has already called us. If we are here because we listened to the call of Jesus, why wouldn't we listen for that call out in the world with people we do not know, people we do not agree with, people who are struggling?

Remember St. Francis' prayer:

I seek to console, rather than to be consoled; to understand, rather than be understood; to love, rather than to be loved.

The place where God and Christ most connect with us is the place where we most connect with other people - where they are hurting and suffering. Deep listening is an act based on a Resurrection perspective, which is really a love perspective.

Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.¹² No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us. (1 John 4:11-12) .

If we, as followers of Christ, have a bias, a worldview that influences our behavior, this is it. But a Resurrection perspective requires a constant "Red Teaming of the Soul". The care and shepherding of God for His Creation does not understand differences, or rather, difference is what God cares for and shepherds in us and others. Deep Listening and speaking from the perspective of Resurrection and love means seeking what is underneath all the differences.

The goal of deep listening is to bring God's love into any given situation, whatever the nation, tribe, people or language; to bring a Resurrection perspective into the worldview and bias of ourselves and others. The goal of plain speech, the goal of Jesus' words to us, is to communicate love, hope, inclusion so we might gather in love, because, as 1 John 4 says, *God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in them.*

I hope I have spoken plainly and out of love today, but more so, I hope we can make ourselves available to the Red Teaming of the soul so we can listen plainly and deeply for the presence of Christ without, within, in our midst and in stranger and enemy alike. Amen.