

Proverbs 8:22-31 **John 1: 1-14**

Good morning. I want to start off with a little brain teaser. You are driving a bus. You go east 12 miles, and turn south and go 2 miles and take on 9 passengers, and then you turn west and go 3 miles and let off 4 passengers. How old is the bus driver?

The main problem that many people have when trying to answer such a brain teaser is listening. A lot of the times, we latch onto certain information that we think is important in a question and then somehow, miss the most important part. When I first read this question, perhaps like some of you listening, I latched onto the directions (east, south, west), the distance and the number of passengers on the bus. Those are things that seemed important. When I got to the end and it asked how old is the bus driver, I just was dumbfounded. "Wait a minute," I thought, "how are we going to find the age of the bus driver from the information given." I took a minute and looked at the numbers and wondered if there was some secret message in the numbers and maybe, if you added them together or something, it would work. It wasn't for a few moments that I finally realized that the clue to this teaser was a simple, three letter word that starts the whole question off. "YOU are the bus driver."

Listening is so important in life and crucial to make relationships work. We all have built into us the need and want to be listened to. Being listened to communicates things like worth, value, love, and respect. It is so important and yet we live in a day and age where there are so many distractions to listening that it makes it more and more difficult to do.

As we were listening to our Gospel reading this morning did we pick up on the important point being related to us that 'the word became flesh' ... Jesus was in the world but the world did not recognize him or receive him but to all who did receive him, those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.

Jesus came to earth for you and me. What is so important about Jesus' mission to earth is that it directly affects our life now and forever. Jesus came to restore our relationship to God the Father. The death of Jesus on the cross is the most important event in history that directly affects our life. Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and Life. He is the way to have unity with God and to become one with God our Father.

Scripture says, "Jesus used many similar stories and illustrations to teach the people as much as they could understand. In fact, in his public ministry he taught using parables; **but afterward, when he was alone with his disciples, he explained everything to them**" His disciples would spend time with Jesus to hear from Him and to learn the meaning of these parables.

In the days before Covid19, making time for reading anything may have proved difficult for some people because of their busy lifestyles. Now, lots of us seem to be 'marking time' waiting for some sort of what we call normality to return. This could be the ideal time to listen to the voice of God through reading his Word. We need to learn the meaning of God's truth and how it applies to us. This type of listening and following is active and not passive. Listening to Jesus requires going to him to learn from him through his word and prayer.

We are fast approaching a seasonal change in the church. It's almost the beginning of the season of Lent as we, with Jesus turn our faces to Jerusalem and His suffering and death on the cross - and to the resurrection life begun there.

To help us individually and as a church, we have our Lent plus Prayer Course each Tuesday for the next few weeks, and there is still time to register and join in.

In 2010, there was a fascinating television programme called 'The Big Silence' - you may remember it where five members of the general public who had little or no church background were invited to take part in a 3 month experiment with the community of Benedictine monks at Worth Abbey in Crawley

Under the personal guidance of the Abbot the challenge before them was to learn the deeply counter-cultural practice of silence. None of them found it easy - but they were all moved and surprised by how the silence and space to listen to God, opened up possibilities of change in their lives.

With many of us shut in our homes we have plenty of times of silence and long to hear the voices of loved ones who we cannot see or meet. Thank goodness for the technology that can be a 'God sent' lifeline for us to fill our empty hours. If we go for a walk we listen to the birds and in Matthews Gospel (Ch 10:29-31) Jesus says, 'not one sparrow falls to the ground that the Father doesn't know about and that we are worth more than many sparrows'. In John 3:vs 8 it says, the wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going.'

Jesus, led Peter, James and John up a high mountain and as he was transfigured before them they heard a voice saying, 'this is my beloved son, listen to him.'

That same voice beckons to us as we stand on the verge of our journey into the season of Lent. Lent calls us to rediscover our spirituality

to listen to God: and different as we all are - in baptism we are God's precious children - forgiven, loved, held and only from that identity, we are called and sent to do God's work in the world. Rooted and grounded in that love, we can then serve God as best we can in our lockdown situation.

If all our doing seems pointless, we need to learn again and enter a quiet place of awe and mystery. To say simply, in the words of the boy Samuel in the Old Testament: 1 Sam 3:10

"Speak Lord, for your servant is listening."

The Abbot of Worth made this comment:

Silence is something that people today avoid or even fear ...

Daunting as it may be, we all need silence. When we enter regularly into silence, we start to see things with greater clarity. We can come to know ourselves and come in touch with that part of ourselves which is the deepest part: our soul. Silence is the gateway to the soul and the soul is the gateway to God.

There are many many things waiting for our attention - for living out our call to discipleship, for taking up our cross encouraged by Jesus' words 'Get up and do not be afraid'. Those words may be hard to hear these days as we listen to the news at home and abroad but we need to hear the good news as well of things happening in our world.

But in order to be able to do that, at least for now Just listen!

I said earlier about listening to the wind and there is a great story in 1 Kings about a prophet named Elijah who is on a mountain top waiting for God to come so that they could speak. As he is on the mountain a "mighty wind storm hits the mountain" but God was not in the wind. After that there was an earthquake, but again God was not in the earthquake. After that there was fire but again, no God. Finally, there was a gentle whisper and at that Elijah came out of the cave he was waiting in and spoke to God. It is so important to make sure that during our journey through Lent we are taking time to "be still" and take the time to separate ourselves from the world and everything going on around us.

Amen. Reflective music <https://youtu.be/pG4x-zi3FBw>