

Wicker Park Lutheran Church

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Perhaps you have a teacher or (God forbid!) a preacher that as much as you listen to them you just don't understand?

Well, you are not alone. In our gospel passage today, the disciples hear a booming voice from above and it is not the first time. You may remember back to Jesus' baptism, there is also a booming voice from above declaring "You are my son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." The voices connect these passages, connect these moments of revelation and epiphany about who Jesus is.

But Even after this second booming voice, it seems listening- truly understanding- comes as a challenge. Before this passage, Jesus urges the disciples to "Pay attention to what you hear" (4:24) and right before our gospel passage today when Jesus predicts his own death- the disciples had trouble understanding. When Jesus explains he'll suffer, be killed and be raised after three days, Mark tells us that "Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him" (8:32). And again, right after they come down off the mountain, Jesus again predicts his death and Mark says, "...they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him." (9:32). They didn't quite get Jesus.

There's a pattern here. And this second booming voice, inviting the disciples to LISTEN to Jesus, lets us know --that the disciples have a listening problem.

It was right after college, that I realized I too had something of a listening problem. I was working with community coalitions in South LA, when I was shocked to learn that in South LA- where mostly African American and Latinx communities lived- residents were dying of cardiovascular disease at three times the rate of residents of West LA- mostly white communities. I realized that whole sections of society didn't have a voice when it comes to the distribution of parks, hospitals, and fresh food markets- literally things that give life and health. I realized as a person of white living in systems and governments made for and centering white people, I had privilege, and there were whole groups of people whose struggles and needs and VOICES certainly hadn't been on *my* radar.

Perhaps, if you are like me, you too may struggle to listen to voices and lives that, we previously have not. We are quick to, like Peter, fill the silence with our own voice. Or we are quick to jump into action before listening. Or maybe out of sheer fear of change or doing things differently, that we become paralyzed in terror like Peter. Any number of responses can get in the way of truly listening.

At this glorious transfiguration moment, the disciples are invited not only to Jesus' words but also to Jesus' actions. They are invited to listen to not just the proclaimed word but to Jesus' life as well. A life marked by listening to the sick, the neglected, the ones everyone else shushed or pushed away. Jesus listened to the man with an unclean spirit who cried out in the synagogue, Jesus listened to a leper who came to him begging for healing, Jesus listened to a woman who had been bleeding for 12 years- he stopped in his tracks when she reached out and touched his garment. He listens to the hungry crowds asking for something to eat.

The disciples are invited to not only listen to Jesus' words, but to also enter into Jesus' life-giving ministry and to center the voices that Jesus centers, even though it means decentering their natural gut reactions.

So too God invites us to listen to the example of Jesus' life, and like him, listen to the voices that have otherwise been silenced.

Being February and Black History Month, I am reminded that in the context of a society based on white supremacy, listening as Jesus listened means centering non-white voices. It means making time to listen to Black scholars, activists and artists that we maybe haven't listened to.

When I realized I had a listening problem, it was in large part thanks to the director of my organization at the time, Lark Galloway Gilliam. Lark and my other mentors at that time taught me how to recognize institutional racism, listen for voices that are not at the table...and not only to listen for them but to seek them out, and raise them up.

Lark really shook things up in South LA. After many healthcare establishments were burned to the ground after the 1992 riots, she formed her own nonprofit focused on health policy and advocacy. She secured millions of dollars in federal and state grants to study the issues affecting her community. And after leading a lawsuit against a local oil company, she achieved unheard of environmental protections for the communities around a South LA oil field.

I lift Lark's voice and memory today because I think it reminds us that the foundation of our society is shaken when voices, thoughts, and experiences of people of color are centered, rather than people of white. When we devote our

time and energy to listen to what they are saying. When their struggles become everyone's struggles. When their joy becomes everyone's joy.

We have a listening problem. It's true. We haven't heard every voice and we don't give every voice equal weight. But as we pay attention to voices and lives, we previously haven't, we join Jesus in that stunning revelation at the transfiguration-- we join in the JOY of finding **new life together in Christ**. That comes with a symphony of voices being heard. All in their unique glorious tones. The joy of a new community in Christ.

Today, Mila's baptism *reminds* us of that new life we have together, in God, through Christ. Moments ago, we heard that in baptism we're called to listen to Jesus' model, because God gives us our best example for being together as people through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Mila was given a candle lit from the tall paschal candle, which reminds us of all the new saints who have been baptized alongside that candle and who have been adopted into this new community of Christ.

As we all remember our own baptisms today, may we join Jesus in prioritizing voices that our society pushes aside and shushes. When we listen to these voices, we listen to Jesus' voice, we follow Jesus' footsteps. We join with Jesus in cracking the foundations of systems of oppression and forging a new way of living life in community and giving life to one another. Amen.