

Look and Listen Part 3

We are continuing our series Look and Listen this morning. Pastor Sarah had a great message last Sunday. If you wonder about the significance of Jesus' baptism by John, go back and listen to that message from last Sunday. It was so good.

For almost two years we've been dealing with a worldwide pandemic and wondering if some of what's happening in the world is a sign of the end. A lot of the possible roads we could take as a nation and as the church will lead to dramatic changes in the future. Is this the end, or is this a hinge? You may remember me talking about this several years ago, my belief that we were approaching another hinge period in the world's history. Every 500 years there has been a hinge period, a shift affecting the church and the Christian faith, an opportunity for refinement. Just a quick summary: The first 500 years of the church was considered the apostolic age and the age of the church fathers. Christianity spread incredibly around the known world. After the first 500 years you witness the fall of the Roman Empire, the beginning of the Dark Ages, the rise of monasticism, many true lovers of Christ isolating themselves in monasteries and convents, studying, instructing and copying the Scripture. Fast forward another 500 years to 1054 and you have what is called the Great Schism and the break between the Western and Eastern Church, (Roman Catholicism in the West, centered in Rome; Eastern Orthodoxy in the East, based in Constantinople.) Five hundred years later in 1517 comes the Protestant Reformation, another shift in the church and a refining of the faith and now, five hundred years later, we find ourselves in another hinge period, another time of reconfiguring the faith and seeing changes occurring in the political and religious world. Strangely enough, most all of these hinge periods were accompanied by some kind of pandemic. Remember the Bubonic Plague? The Black Death? So is all of this a sign of the end or a sign of the hinge? The point is, change is coming. Change is here in the life of the church. Hopefulness comes in understanding we have an opportunity to refine and define and affirm the bedrock of our Christian faith. We have an opportunity in this changing hinge period to lift up Jesus, to point people to Jesus and to saving faith in Jesus as never before. One of the questions to be answered is, to which Jesus are we pointing people? Jesus said, **“At that time if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or ‘There he is!’ do not believe it. For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect – if that were possible. See, I have told you ahead of time. So if anyone tells you, ‘there he is, out in the desert,’ do not go**

out; or ‘Here he is, in the inner rooms,’ do not believe it.” Matthew 24:23-26 There are going to be all kinds of people pointing to all kinds of things claiming this is from Jesus. Jesus endorsed this party, this candidate, this health food, this diet plan. People want to put Jesus’ brand on everything. How do we know this is Jesus? We’ve got people preaching a militaristic Jesus, a modern version of the Jesus from Revelation 19, riding a white horse and making war against our enemies. He is leading the armies of heaven with him and that image fires up people. “Let’s grab the Christian flag and go beat up some sinners.” Jesus is here and he’s in a pretty bad mood. Is that the Jesus we’re looking for? This sermon series is Look and Listen, remember? Is that the Jesus we are looking and listening for? “Well, you know Jesus made a whip and turned over the tables of the money changers and chased them out of the temple. That’s what we need to do.” Is that what he called us to do? Yes, he did turn over the tables but he didn’t tell his disciples to do it. He was making a point, but he didn’t call us to flip tables and take names. What did he call us to? Jesus said, **“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it.” Luke 9:23-24** That’s his call. Deny yourself, take up your cross and die to self and live for him. Follow Him. What did he call us to do? **“Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” Matthew 28:19** That’s his call, his command. Jesus called us to come and die. We’re to take up our cross and follow him. He called us to come and serve. We are to follow the example of Jesus, to wrap a towel around our waist and wash feet and serve others. He called us to go and tell. To take this good news to the uttermost parts of the earth, to share the gospel with everyone in our world. Look and listen for his voice, for his call. His voice will be a call to holiness, a call to service, a call to surrender, a call to obedience.

How can we know for sure we are hearing his voice? Jesus said in John 10 that He was the good shepherd and his sheep recognize his voice. Amidst all the competing versions of Jesus, amidst all of the voices claiming to speak for him, let’s make sure we are looking to and listening to the Jesus revealed to us in Scripture.

More than 50 years ago I heard Gayle Erwin share what he called The Jesus Style, explaining the nature of Jesus. That teaching has guided my understanding of Jesus from that time until today. If you claim to be speaking for Jesus, but you aren’t exhibiting the nature of

Jesus, you aren't treating people as Jesus treated people, you aren't showing the character of Jesus, I'm probably not going to be having any of what you are promoting, regardless.

Gayle started by looking at the passages of Scripture where Jesus speaks of the greatest in the kingdom. I think we could all agree that Jesus is in fact the greatest in the kingdom, so when he says, "if you want to be the greatest in the kingdom, do this..." he is showing us something of his own nature and character. If we want to know what to look for and what to listen for to make sure this is Jesus, consider what Jesus has to say.

"They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, 'What were you arguing about on the road?' But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest. Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, 'If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last and the servant of all.'" Mark 9:33-35

"The greatest among you will be your servant." Matthew 23:11

"At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, 'Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?' He called a little child and had him stand among them. And he said, 'I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.'" Matthew 18:1-4

Look and listen for Jesus. How do we know it's him, his voice? Is the voice that's speaking promoting self or serving others? Is that voice calling us to serve? Jesus, the greatest among us, comes as a servant. The servant is one who looks for ways to help others, to do things that free others to be all God created them to be. A servant comes to lift burdens, not impose burdens. Gayle Erwin always speaks of it as living an others-centered life. Jesus said, "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many." Matthew 20:28. The path to greatness is a path of service to others. You can recognize the voice of Jesus because He will be calling us to serve rather than telling us how to be served.

Jesus also spoke of being humble like a child. Humility is seeing yourself as you really are, being honest, admitting what you don't know, transparent, living without pretense, not trying to be something or someone you aren't, not "putting on airs" as the saying goes, but recognizing who you are in Christ and cooperating with the work of the Holy Spirit as he makes you more and more like Jesus. You can recognize the voice of Jesus because he speaks truth, no hidden agendas, honest, open, without pretense. His voice will call you to honesty and away from

deceit, to transparency and not the lifestyle of bait and switch. It's one of the things about becoming like children. Children don't know how to be deceitful. At least they aren't very good at it. They don't know how to hide. They learn to be deceitful from grownups. Jesus doesn't deceive, he doesn't speak in sensational headlines, he doesn't say one thing but mean another. Like a child, he speaks the truth in love. Not proud or arrogant. His voice will call us to honesty, humility, transparency. If there is deceit and the truth is distorted, even for a good cause, that may not be Jesus talking. Look and listen for Jesus.

“Also a dispute arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest. Jesus said to them, ‘The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? But I am among you as one who serves.’” Luke 22:24-27

“For he who is least among you all – he is the greatest.” Luke 9:48

Once again Jesus speaks of servanthood. This is how he is among us, this is where we will find him and find those who are listening to his voice, serving others! He says it's the way of the Gentiles, the pagans, to lord it over one another, to bully others, to strong arm others, to manipulate others to get their way, to shame others, but not so among you, not among the people of God. Instead, he says the greatest among you should be like the least, the last, the youngest. Eager to serve, to prefer others above ourselves.

In the culture of the Old and New Testament, the youngest was the disadvantaged child. It was the eldest who received a double portion of the inheritance. The youngest had little stake in the system. He had less attachment to things. We are called to live our lives as the youngest, as pilgrims passing through. Our stake is not in earthly things, in an earthly inheritance, but in our heavenly inheritance as part of the family of God. His voice is the one that calls us to service, the one that calls us to value what heaven values, i.e. people not things, heavenly treasures rather than earthly riches. We can recognize His voice. It's the voice that calls us to hold loosely to things and hold tightly to Him; it's His voice that calls us to value relationship rather than titles or position. Look and listen for him among us as the least, the last, the youngest, as one who serves.

If you are looking for and listening for Jesus, consider the Apostle Paul's word on the nature of Jesus. **“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”** **Philippians 2:5-11** Jesus was not driven by blind ambition but made of himself nothing. One translation says he made of himself no reputation, another says he emptied himself. He wasn't seeking reputation, he was focused on obedience. He was the epitome of humility, not worried about what others thought but only a desire to please the Father. In obedience he took upon himself the very nature of a slave, a servant (here it is again), the Son, the Word made flesh dwelling among us, obedient to the point of dying on a cross, bearing our shame and sin in his own flesh. This is the Jesus we look to and listen to. Now exalted to the highest place and given the name that is above every name. We honor him, we look to him, we follow him and walk in obedience and we remember what he said. **“Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.”** **John 20:21**

In the same way, in the same style, the same manner that the Father sent Jesus, he sends us. We are to listen to him, to live as he lived, to take up our cross and follow him. He is sending us as servants, as children, as the least, as the last, the youngest, he sends us in humility, in honesty and transparency, he sends us, not to make a name for ourselves, but to lift up the name of Jesus and to exalt him. He sends us, not lording it over others but lifting others up, others centered, not self-centered. He sends us, not to get our own way, but to follow his way.

This is the Jesus we are to look to and listen to. His sheep recognize his voice because we know and understand his nature. What is he saying to you? Look and listen. What's he calling you to? I remembered a chorus yesterday by Kelly Willard. “Make me a servant, humble and meek, Lord let me lift up those who are weak, and may the prayer of my heart always be, make me a servant, make me a servant, make me a servant today.” Look and listen and let's be who he has called us to be, like Jesus, others centered, His servants for today and for this hinge period.