

Hearing Aids
Luke 9:28-36 (The Transfiguration)
February 14, 2010—Emmaus Road Mennonite Fellowship

As I get older, I realize that the time will probably come when I will need a hearing aid to help me listen to what's going on around me.

Karen and my three young adult children sometimes remind me that the time is sooner than I want to admit!

"Didn't you hear what I just said?" and

"If you were listening, you'd know what we decided".

are common phrases around our house.

Maybe my problem is selective hearing—I hear only what I want to hear.

Or maybe it's all the distractions and other noises around me that keep me from hearing and listening to those I am with.

Cell phones, texting, all kinds of mobile technology and social networking sites are changing the ways we communicate and provide more distractions than ever before.

We serve a God who knows that it's easy to get distracted by lots of different competing messages around us. So throughout history, God has communicated with His people in some pretty creative and memorable ways:

God knows this and has used different "hearing aids" as signs to help people clearly hear His voice and the messages He wants the world to hear:

--**Moses:** Burning bush, chosen to be messenger of the Law and 10 Commandments to people of Israel.

Balaam's donkey: to communicate to Balaam what God wanted him to do, because he was blinded by his greed and self-interest

Angels—Gabriel to Mary, angels to shepherds

Mary—humble, poor peasant—Magnificat

John the Baptist—grasshopper-eating, camel-hair wearing wild man, came to prepare the world for the ministry of Jesus the Savior and Messiah.

Understanding what Jesus' kingdom is all about is not easy and takes a long time to figure out—we need constant reminders. The noise of the world around us drowns out the gospel message that calls us to a life of servanthood and sacrificial love as Jesus lived.

Now in today's passage, about halfway through Jesus' ministry, God uses another hearing aid to get his disciples' attention—specifically Jesus' inner circle of Peter, James and John. It's called the **transfiguration**:

On a **mountain**, where encounters with God often happened in the Bible.

Moses and Elijah were present—the two greatest prophets of the O.T.

Moses: represents the law of the Old Covenant that God gave him also on a mountain

Elijah: great prophet who predicted the coming of the Messiah

Jesus: represents the fulfillment of both the Law and the promise of the Messiah

Jesus' figure is transformed—face changed, clothes looked like they had been washed with a whole tub of oxyclean.

The transfiguration is only two times when God's voice comes down from heaven—first is when Jesus was baptized and about to begin his ministry: This is my Son, with whom I am well pleased.

Now: This is my Son, my chosen or beloved; then God says, “Listen to him”

Funny that he says it now, already about halfway through Jesus' ministry!

It kind of reminds me of parenting—you've been lecturing your children for about 10 minutes, then you realize that they haven't heard hardly anything of what you've said, so you just stop and say in a stern voice: “Are you listening to me?”

But if we look at what took place leading up to the Transfiguration, it's easy to see why the disciples needed a wake-up call to listen to Jesus, to be reminded of who he was.

Chapter 8—Jesus calmed the storm when he and disciples were out on a boat. Jesus pointed out their lack of faith. Disciples still unsure of his identity “who is this that even the winds and the water obey him?”

First part of chapter 9: Feeding of 5000—disciples wanted to send the crowds away to fend for themselves, but Jesus said “you feed them”. They protested—lacked compassion and weren’t aware of the power Jesus had to provide lunch for everyone there that day

Vs. 20: Peter’s confession: **You are the Messiah** –recognized Jesus’ identity, but didn’t understand fully what it meant for them as followers of the Messiah.

Vs. 21-27: Jesus dropped a bombshell on his disciples—he did not fit into the mold of the Messiah who would come and set up his kingdom by earthly force like other leaders with power would do.

Instead, Jesus told them he was going to suffer, and that those who wanted to follow him must also be willing to take up their cross, and be ready to lose their life in order to find it.

Jesus is talking about a life that is focused not on using power to lord over others, but a power that is harnessed through love, a love whose power takes the form of a humble servant,

agape love, unconditional love that is shared with both neighbors and enemies alike

a love that is familiar with the phrases “I’m sorry” and “You are forgiven”.

a love that is ready to sacrifice for the sake of others, no matter what the cost.

This is a love that goes way deeper than the messages of love often associated with **Valentine’s Day**, messages that base love on romantic feelings but lack the commitment, the servanthood, the forgiveness and the sacrifice that is needed for love to last a lifetime.

Jesus is saying that anyone who wants to call themselves his disciple is going to be called to the same lifestyle of sacrificial love that he is modeling with his own life.

And it's such a radical kind of love that it needs to be heard loud and clear, it needs to somehow be heard above all the prevailing voices and messages about what the Messiah should look like and live like, and how a follower of the Messiah should live.

So that's where the **Transfiguration** come in. It functions like a big **hearing aid**, tuning in to a voice above all those prevailing voices around the disciples, above all the noise of the world and its ways.

Above it all comes the voice of God spoken to Jesus' inner circle of disciples, the three key people Jesus has selected to carry forth the good news of his Kingdom,

saying loudly and clearly "Yes, this **is my** Son, the one I have chosen as Savior and Messiah. Listen to **Him**, not to the other voices you hear around you."

After this Transfiguration event, we might expect that the disciples had it all figured out, and that they would go forth with authority and confidence as bearers of Jesus' sacrificial love.

But instead in the verses that follow in Ch. 9, we see the contrary:

In verse 37, We hear about disciples who didn't realize their power to heal and confront evil,

Vs. 44-45, we see disciples who still didn't understand or want to accept that Jesus was going to be betrayed and would have to suffer

Vs. 46, they argued about who among them was going to be greatest in the kingdom

Vs. 54, James and John burned with anger of being rejected in a village that they wanted to call down fire from heaven to destroy it and all its inhabitants.

How does this make you feel? Sometimes I feel discouraged that if those closest to Jesus couldn't even figure out what Jesus was trying to get through to them—even

after a big hearing aid like the transfiguration, how am I ever going to be able to do it?

On the other hand, it gives me comfort...comfort in knowing that the disciples Jesus chose weren't perfect people who had it all together. They were ordinary human beings with egos and flaws and people with selective hearing, just like me.

Last week we had our Spring **Spiritual Life Week** at Bluffton University. Jonathan Larson and Dorothy Harding spoke and sang on the theme "Extending your family tree". One of the popular events of the week was a **Battle of the Airbands**.

Some of us staff and faculty presented the song **Viva la Vida**— about a guy who used to rule the world, and now his life has fallen apart, he sweeps the streets he used to own.

He's reflecting on how he used power to control others, how there was never an honest word, intimidate others through fear, discovered that his castles stood on pillars of salt and sand.

"I know St. Peter won't call my name" leads me to believe that he knows that God is not pleased with a life of living for oneself and lording over other people, and that he has a sense of regret for how he abused the power he had.

I think he came to realize the hard way that the best way to live is by serving others in humility.

Sometimes it takes our world falling apart to learn how to trust God, how to be a real disciple of Jesus, how to treat others, and to discover what really is important in life.

Even though I fall short and even fall down time and time again as I seek to follow Jesus' way of sacrificial love, I carry this hope that I can learn to become more like Jesus as my life goes on.

We see this in the lives of Jesus' first disciples—you see, their story doesn't end on the road to Calvary, or even at the cross, or even with the news of the Resurrection.

If we read on past the gospels and into book of **Acts**, we see the transformation that happened in their lives after the Holy Spirit got a hold of them. **Day of Pentecost** was another big hearing aid God provided, people speaking in tongues of different languages and the Spirit being poured out like Peter had a complete turnabout and preached with courage and boldness.

Stephen was willing to die for his faith, and even asked God to forgive those who were stoning him to death,

John became a bishop in the early Church, overseeing and encouraging churches in his area. Even was given a revelation, another hearing aid for the Church, as he was in exile on Patmos.

The list goes on and on...from this first century of the Church throughout the centuries there are examples of disciples who have heard God's voice and calling upon their lives and lived out the radical message of the gospel. They have functioned as God's hearing aids throughout history.

And it continues up until this day, to us, the disciples Jesus has called to follow him at the beginning of the 21st century.

Jesus' way of sacrificial love is radical, so radical that it's often hard to hear in a world where power is used to gain privilege and prestige at other's expense. It's hard to hear in a world where revenge and retaliation are seen as the way to make things right,

It's hard to hear in a world where there is economic recession and people are competing for scarce resources, grabbing for all they can get.

It's hard to hear in a world where we hear so much of the threat of terrorism and different voices instill a fear in us that leads us to not trust strangers and keep a distance from people different from ourselves.

It's hard to hear in a world where love is based largely on feelings that blow to and fro like feathers in the wind.

So how can we hear it?

How do we keep listening to God? What hearing aids can we use?

I would like to leave us with some hearing aids that have been helpful to me over the years, with the hope that they might also help you in some way:

- **-make time to be alone with God**—talking *and* listening to God
The disciples “kept silent” after the Transfiguration experience—time to process and reflect on what had happened. Jesus knew they didn’t have it all figured out. We need that discipline too!
- **-take time to listen to people and hear their stories, resist temptation to judge them.** Remember the words of **St. Francis of Assisi**—seek first to understand, then to be understood.-
- see **each person as unique individual created in the image of God.** Look for Jesus in the faces of others, the “divine spark” God has put in them.

-take time to read from authors who nourish your soul.

Books, periodicals, and in today’s age, we can listen to podcasts, read online magazines and websites.

-remember that we are all still apprentices of Jesus. Growing as a disciple is a lifelong process, no one has completely arrived yet. 90 students and faculty/staff on our campus are going through a book during Lent called *Apprenticeship with Jesus*.

When we open ourselves up to hearing God, we open ourselves up to the possibility of growing as disciples whose lifestyle of sacrificial love becomes a hearing aid to the world around us.

Prayer:

God, may our ears be open to hear your voice above all the other noise around us, Give us the courage to respond in obedience to your voice and what you are calling us to do and who you are calling us to be,

*And may we live in such a way that those around us hear through us the Good News that the radical love of Jesus is in our midst.
Let all who have ears to hear, listen. AMEN.*