

## **Sermon: *Listen, All You Who Have Ears to Hear***

You, my neighbors, may wonder why I am dressed so elegantly in my Sabbath best. I will tell you – listen!

On Friday evening, I walked to the seashore to hear the Rabbi “Yeh-shoo-wa.” As we sat along the shoreline, he, speaking from a boat, used words and images that we tenant farmers understood, telling us a story right out of our daily lives.

The story had four parts. It was a story of a sower of seeds, of the seeds themselves, the field, and the harvest. As a farmer, a sower of seeds, I was most caught up with the part of the story telling of the sower.

A few of you, here among friends and neighbors, may be from the city; so, all of you, kindly bear with me as I explain a context known to most of us peasant farmers.

Yeshua begins the story by telling us all to “listen” – to hear! His beginning with the words, “Shema,” reminded me of the words we all recognize as the very first words that open our morning prayer,

*Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone!*

*Therefore, you shall love the lord, your God, with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength.*

I’m sure he meant for me to make that connection. I was to listen, to hear.

It hit me. What does it mean for me to listen~ to truly hear? To hear with my heart, to hear with my soul, to hear with all my strength! Hearing with understanding~ requires something of me!

Was I open to hear? To have my certainties challenged – especially certainties long accepted in tradition and religion? Did I dare to listen, knowing that truly listening might upset my worldview and bring disorientation. Could I trust in the benefit of listening? ...Dare I listen!?

Of course, I processed what I heard through the lens of my experiences, through our shared culture, and religious traditions. ...Hah! But Yeshua was constantly challenging norms and beliefs of the elders and temple elite, saying that *“You have heard it said, but I say to you...”* then offering a very different~ view of what God desires of us.

In the story, Yeshua, told us of a sower, a peasant farmer like ourselves, who took handful of seeds from his apron, and cast them this way and that. What I found strange in the story was how indiscriminate, the sower was – what seemed to me a wastefully way sowing of seeds. He was not even observing boundaries, even though boundaries of separateness are foundational to our religious practices.

Some seed fell on the path, some onto hard, rocky ground, some among thorns, some on good ground. The birds must have had a feast!

I wonder if Yeshua was injecting humor in setting up an impossible situation where crop failure was virtually certain. ...Perhaps! I say this because despite all the forces against his having a good crop – the trampling of seed on the path, the blight of the birds, the thorns, and rocky ground – there was still an abundant harvest.

If God~ is the sower, was this a way of showing extravagant grace poured out on the deserving and undeserving, given without boundaries, producing abundance even in the hardened and thorny places!

In the best of our yields, we might get ten to one (tenfold), but over the various sectors of the field, this sower was getting yields of thirtyfold, sixtyfold, and one hundredfold!

Amazing!

After telling the story, Yeshua says, “Listen, let anyone with ears hear!”

We were left to reflect on just what the story was saying to each of us. While some in the crowd of listeners began to talk with each other offering interpretations, my thoughts turned to the sower and to the seed being sown.

I think that Yeshua saw God as the sower. Though some of us thought of Yeshua himself as the sower – the sower of God’s Word for us. The seed being the Word sown. ...We being the soil.

The soil gets most of the attention – its readiness to receive the seed. In thinking of myself as the soil. I wondered what kind of soil am I? I am I ready for the seed – cultivated, my hard spots spaded, hoed, and made small and pliable? – Are there parts in me yet hard and rocky, yet too closed minded and unreachable? **Thorny parts** that are argumentative and contentious – ready to fight but not to listen? Or, am I of good soil – open, and humble of mind and heart. I raise the

humble part because I question my being able to say, “Okay, I really do not know it all. I still have something more to learn. So, let me not prejudge or give in to my prejudices, let me listen!”

In confession to you, I realized, through the story, I was being put to the test. I was being asked to face up to the quality of my hearing. ...There was no room for smugness, as though being one of his followers or of understanding myself as one of “God’s chosen people,” an observant Jew – that that passive virtue was enough. ...That that was all that was required of me. ...No, something deeper and more costly was being asked of me. ...I worried!

Then and there, I knew that I needed to re-examine my responsiveness to Yeshua’s teachings, teachings that have long circulated among us. I wondered what **in** these teaching was I hearing but not taking to heart so that they impacted my soul and behavior.

Clearly, Yeshua most cared about the most vulnerable among us. He not only spoke out~ on their behalf, associated with them, he took risks for them – being subject to public shame as one who associated with sinners, he acted to bring them healing even when that brought public rebuke.

That leads me to ask, in hearing his words and seeing those words acted out in his public life, am I letting this influence how I am now behaving? I have eyes~ to see **who**~ in our community is shunned, despised, spoken ill of, refused entrance into the synagogue, suffering social ostracism and oppression. I **have** eyes to see! And, I have ears to hear? Do

I have understanding?... Am I willing to take the journey to understand and then to do what that understanding suggests?

Yeshua once said, “*As you have done to the least of these, you have done to me.*” In assumed innocence, I cannot convincingly ask, “When did I see you in need and did not respond?” ...Indeed! Do I not see Yeshua in the social outcast –those distressed? ...Ironically, *distressed*, because of religious convictions! Yes, our religious convictions **can**~ cause wrongful distress! I cannot just assume all of our traditional religious convictions are in keeping with the teachings and practices of Yeshua. You see, you and I are subject to the prejudices of our society and its conventional interpretation of Scripture!

On seeing and hearing suffering and distress, why do I fail to respond? Perhaps, I fear being shamed by association with the social outcast, fear losing community status, or a good reputation. Or, could it be a fear of losing patronage or support, suffering a financial loss? ...Is it that I fear a push-back from others – their hostility, showing up as disinterest and resentment of my efforts?

Or, is it, simply, that I do not address their distress because of inconvenience – that it will be costly of time and energy? Hah, if so, what kind of follower of Yeshua am I? ...There to follow only when convenient, when the cost and risks are minimal?

**Hard stuff for me!** Is it hard stuff for you as well? ...Yes, we know that as we hear and act, we will need to deal with internal struggles as we seek to be faithful to what the hearing

demands of us! We know that we need to be daring. True, ...we know, too, that we cannot be so convinced of our righteousness that we fail to listen carefully to others who have honest questions about the issues we raise or about whether our response to the distress of others is of God.

Those who question us may have sincere concerns about the scriptural foundations for what we are seeking to do in the name of relieving the distress and suffering of others. We know that we must respond to them with an open mind and heart – engaged in dialogue, and, with them, engaged in study and discernment, ...with our **both**~ seeking the guidance of the Spirit.

So, you see the words of Yeshua, calling us to listen, to open our eyes and ears has brought us to a deep place. I am trusting and hoping that they are bringing us also to a place of and action.

As our prophet Isaiah (55: 10-11) says of the actions of Yahweh, so would Yeshua ask of us:

*For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return~ there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my **word BE** that goes out from my mouth; it shall **not** return to me empty, but it shall **accomplish** that which I purpose, and **succeed** in the thing for which I sent it.*

May God's Word be productive in us. With eyes to see and with ears to hear, may we seek to identify in this historical moment what is required of us. – **Where** and to whom is justice due? **Where** and to whom is loving kindness due?

**What** is the walk that we must walk? **With what** mindset and dispositions do we walk it? ...We **must~** walk it with humility and daring – open to hear, open to act. **AMEN!**