

There is a lot of listening going on in the modern world. Enabled by advances in technology, anyone with internet access, a computer and a microphone can create a recording that could potentially be heard by millions of people. Podcasters have become media personalities based on their podcast popularity, while corporations, institutions and even churches offer their own podcast content, because people are listening, in some instances, for hours at a time.

To whom are you listening? I don't mean podcasts necessarily, although we can have that conversation sometime. What I mean by this question is, to whom are you listening for guidance? Whose words carry weight with you? Each day there are countless voices vying for your attention, many of them we have learned to filter out. To whom are you listening to inform you? Whose opinion has enough power to change your actions? We are all listening to someone, and a lot rides on who that someone is, and what they know.

God the Father gives a clear and simple directive in today's gospel reading. Over Jesus, He repeats the baptismal declaration, "This is my Son, my Chosen One, My beloved." Peter, James and John are the audience for this declaration, and their minds, I'm sure, were exploding as light streamed from Jesus' body, and saints of old stood talking to Him, and a very Old Testament-like cloud surrounded them, and God's own voice reveals Jesus' identity. "This is my Son, my Chosen One, My beloved." Utterly astounding. But there's one more statement. "Listen to Him." Listen to Him. As I said, it's a very clear, very simple directive. God the Father says, 'Jesus is my Son, my beloved Son, chosen to redeem humanity. Listen to Him.' Would you not, from that moment forward, do exactly that? What we have in gospels like Luke's is a record of the disciples trying to listen to Jesus, trying to do as He said, sometimes failing miserably, but sometimes succeeding, participating in kingdom work, and saying things like Peter did in John's gospel, when Jesus asked the twelve if they were going to quit Jesus as their teacher, Peter says, "Where else would we go? You, Jesus, have the words of eternal life." For all of his impulsive behavior, Peter had obviously been listening to Jesus.

So I'll ask once more, to whom are you listening? Whose words carry weight with you? Is Jesus on your list? Is he at the top, where He belongs?

A person could say, "Well, see, that's the problem, I can't just listen to Jesus like listening to a podcast." But guess what? You actually can do that, or something very close, because a great deal of what Jesus said was remembered and recorded by those who heard him say it. You can read what Jesus said in the Bible. If you need it in a podcast format, audio Bibles exist, so you can, by listening to the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, encounter Jesus and His words of eternal life. If you're looking for a spiritual practice to commit to during this upcoming Lenten season, allow me to suggest this. Listen to Jesus. Read His Words. Listen to His Words, in whatever format works for you. Just listen to Him. And if you do, this is the kind of thing you will hear:

To the person unsure that they're lovable, Jesus says, "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." (John 3: 16)

To the person gripped with anxiety about the future, Jesus says, "Do not worry, saying, What shall we eat? Or What shall we drink? Or What shall we wear? For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow..." (Matt. 6: 31—34)

To the person whose guilt is weighing them down, Jesus says, "Don't be afraid. "Your sins are forgiven. Your faith has saved you. Go in peace." (Luke 7: 48, 50).

To the person who is running on empty, Jesus says, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:30)

To the person wondering if they matter to God, Jesus says, "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows." (Matthew 10: 29—31.)

To the person scared of death, Jesus says, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die." (John 11: 25—26) "In my Father's house are many rooms...I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. (John 14: 2—3)

To the person afraid that their life is meaningless, Jesus says, "...I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last."(Matthew 16: 16) "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden...in the same way let your light shine before men that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."

To the person concerned that their questions and doubts will disqualify them from God's blessing, Jesus says, "Whoever comes to me I will never drive away. The will of Him who sent me [is this:] that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day." (John 6: 37—40, paraphrased)

This is what awaits you when you listen to Jesus—the words of eternal life.