

Meditation: "Selective Hearing"

Okay, so who here, when they saw the sermon title, thought of something like this?



That's not exactly what I had in mind when I chose the title though. What I was thinking of was, and I'm going to date myself now, what I was thinking of was something that happened when I was a child at Expo 67 in Montreal. My parents and my brother and I were there to see and experience all that was part of that exposition. I remember a ride on a hovercraft. I also remember that, in one of the pavilions, there was this machine set up that squirted batter into hot oil to form a miniature doughnut. The dough cooked as it floated along, sort of like the lazy river ride at the waterpark, and there was a thing to flip the half-cooked doughnut over to cook the other side, before it came out of the hot oil and was sprinkled with cinnamon sugar. I was captivated by this marvel of technology. In fact, I was so enthralled by the way everything worked that when my parents and my brother, who were at an adjacent display, moved on, I stayed behind, sort of like when Jesus stayed on at the Temple when he was a boy, and his parents left to return home. Jesus was quite content to stay and learn for three days while his parents panicked. I, on the other hand, when my curiosity had been sated, looked up to discover that I was all alone in a strange city, surrounded by strangers, with no parents in sight or in earshot. When I realized that I had been left behind I started bawling, and wandering around searching for my parents. Eventually, a kind mother stopped me from wandering and made me stand in one place. She stayed with me, but wanted me to keep bawling. She knew the secret every mother knows about selective hearing. Even in a large room or at a park where there are dozens or hundreds of children and parents, if a child cries the parents of that child know that it is their child that is crying, and they seek out their child.

Eventually, when they had entered another pavilion, my mother realized that I was not with them. She had thought I was with my father, and he thought I was with my mother. Frantically, she returned to the previous pavilion and retraced their steps, but by the time she got to the last place she had seen me, I was not to be found, because I had moved. That's when she started listening carefully. She started walking in an outward spiral until she heard what she knew was my crying. As she started in my direction she called, and my selective hearing picked my mother's voice out of the thousands of people who were in the building. We found one another, to each other's great relief, and moved on to the next pavilion to join my father and brother. I'll never forget the panic I felt that day, or the sound of my mother's voice.

Just as I recognized my mother's voice, even when I couldn't see her, Jesus said, "My sheep hear my voice." Over the voices of the false prophets, over the voices of the Roman occupiers, over the voices of the religious extremists, over the voices of those spreading misinformation or disinformation, over the voices of the chief priest, the scribes, the Sadducees, the Pharisees, the Zealots, and all the other voices surrounding them, Jesus' disciples can pick out Jesus' voice.

I wondered about this. Why? Why could I pick out my mother's voice? Why could the disciples pick out Jesus' voice? The only thing I've been able to come up with as an answer to these questions is 'love.' My mother, like most mothers and their children, loved me, and was able to pick my cry out of all the noise in the pavilion in Montreal. Likewise, I love my mother, and was able to discern her voice out of all the voices around me. I think the same is true for the disciples. They loved Jesus, and knew they were loved by Jesus, and could pick his voice out of a throng of other voices.

And I don't think it stops at the unique characteristics of the pitch or intonation of Jesus' voice that the disciples were able to identify. I think that they also recognized the content of what Jesus was saying. I think they knew that when they heard a voice that said something like, "Don't trust or have anything to do with that person because s/he is not like us," they knew it wasn't Jesus. Jesus loved, healed, talked with, taught, and/or liberated anyone who was created in God's image....in short, anyone. Jesus didn't exclude anyone from his ministry, not lepers, not the possessed by spirits, not people who were blind or crippled, not Roman centurions, not gentiles, not children, not mothers, not anyone, and his disciples knew it. They knew his voice, and they knew his teachings, and they loved him.

And when I say they loved him, the proof was in the pudding, so to speak. Just as I sought to please my mother by doing the things she expected of me, Jesus' disciples proved their love for Jesus by doing the things he expected of them.... casting out unclean spirits, healing the sick, and if I had read the lesson from the book of Acts you would have heard that Peter even raised Dorcas from death.

The disciples knew Jesus voice, and teachings, and loved him, AND, like any relationship, it was a two-way street. Jesus knew his disciples and loved them, just as our mothers love(d) us, even if we sometimes disappointed them.

The question I have for us today is, amongst all of the competing voices in our society.... And there are lots to listen to right now with both provincial and municipal elections coming, and the election of a new leader of the Conservative party of Canada, and Freedom Demonstrations, and war, and a pandemic that isn't over, and social media, and..... the question is, amongst all those voices, can we pick out Jesus' voice, and are we willing to live as Jesus would expect us to live? I wonder.