

Sunday February 16, 2025
Sixth Sunday after Epiphany

Meditation: "Who has your ear?"

There once was a shepherd boy who was bored as he sat on the hillside watching the village sheep. To amuse himself he took a great breath and sang out, "Wolf! Wolf! The Wolf is chasing the sheep!"

The villagers came running up the hill to help the boy drive the wolf away. But when they arrived at the top of the hill, they found no wolf. The boy laughed at the sight of their angry faces.

"Don't cry 'wolf', shepherd boy," said the villagers, "when there's no wolf!" They went grumbling back down the hill.

Later, the boy sang out again, "Wolf! Wolf! The wolf is chasing the sheep!" To his naughty delight, he watched the villagers run up the hill to help him drive the wolf away.

When the villagers saw no wolf they sternly said, "Save your frightened song for when there is really something wrong! Don't cry 'wolf' when there is NO wolf!"

But the boy just grinned and watched them go grumbling down the hill once more.

Later, he saw a REAL wolf prowling about his flock. Alarmed, he leaped to his feet and sang out as loudly as he could, "Wolf! Wolf!"

But the villagers thought he was trying to fool them again, and so they didn't come.

At sunset, everyone wondered why the shepherd boy hadn't returned to the village with their sheep. They went up the hill to find the boy. They found him weeping.

"There really was a wolf here! The flock has scattered! I cried out, "Wolf!" Why didn't you come?"

An old man tried to comfort the boy as they walked back to the village.

"We'll help you look for the lost sheep in the morning," he said, putting his arm around the youth, "Nobody believes a liar...even when he is telling the truth!"

I don't know how many times I've preached on the gospel lesson for today. It is Luke's version of Matthew's sermon on the mount, you know, the one with blessings and woe, only Luke's version is given on the plain and not on the mount. I wanted a new challenge. And then I read the Old Testament lesson we just heard from Jeremiah. Blessed are those who trust in God and cursed are those who trust in mere mortals. I thought about the fact that we are in the middle of a provincial election, and that we will likely have a spring federal election too. Is there a connection between the lesson and the elections, I wondered.

During an election, we are asked to put our trust in one of the candidates, or parties, or leaders. As Christians, meaningful participation in democratic elections is one way to act on our faith. Part of meaningful participation is to make sure that we are informed about the issues facing us and the platform of the various candidates and their parties. It seems to me that in order to figure out who we ought to vote for will take some listening.

I think there is a connection between trust and listening. I'm just not sure which way it goes. Do we listen mostly only to those we trust? Or, do we come to trust those we listen to most? Or could it be both? Who has your ear? It matters. In the case of the story, the villagers listened to the cries for help, and they acted on what they heard. But eventually they learned not to trust the shepherd. He had proven himself to be un-trustworthy by his actions, so he wasn't listened to when the need was real. The question I have is, are we listening? Are we listening to all of the candidates, all of the party leaders, or just some of them? Are we listening to all of the things they are telling us, or just the parts that we want to hear? Are we listening to the strong person who is going to save us from impending doom, or are we also listening to other perspectives, other issues?

Is this a one issue election – economic war with our southern neighbours? Or are there other issues that are just as important? What about the underfunding of our post secondary educational institutions? What about the fact that tens of thousands of Ontarians are without access to primary health care? What about the underfunding of our primary and secondary schools that are in desperate need of repairs, upgrades or replacement? What about the homelessness crisis, or the addiction crisis, or the lack of social housing, or the need to increase ODSP (Ontario Disability Support Program) at least to the poverty line? Is sinking tens of billions of dollars over the next couple of decades to build a tunnel under Toronto to improve traffic worth the cost of the things that will not have money spent on them? BTW, that tunnel is now officially part of the platform of one of the parties.

And what about the candidates themselves? Who are they listening to? Are they listening solely to the electorate, trying to gauge what they should say in order to get themselves elected? Or are they listening to God before they engage their mouths? Are they trying to seek what is best for all, or are they just pandering to a voting block?

I feel like I'm in the weeds on this one. The scripture says not to put our trust in mere mortals and in human strength, but to put our trust in God. But this is an election and God isn't on the ballot. We have to put some kind of trust, limited as it may be, in one person or another. Or is that the point Jeremiah is trying to make? Is Jeremiah trying to tell us not to put ALL of our trust in mere mortals without any other consideration? Is Jeremiah trying to tell us to put our trust first and foremost in God, and then to look at the mortals we are asked to trust from God's perspective?

I think that is where I am going to start. Listen first to God and then listen to the candidates to see where there is, or is not, congruity between their vision and God's vision – the kingdom of God, Jesus called it. My faith is first and foremost in God.

I'm going to paraphrase something taken from a poem I read this week. The poem was written by Wendell Berry, on the topic of 'hope.' I'm going to substitute the word 'faith' where he has 'knowledge.'

[Faith] cannot be taken from you by power
or by wealth. It will stop your ears to the powerful
when they ask for your faith, and to the wealthy
when they ask for land and your work.

When you listen to the candidates in the coming days, listen with the ears of faith.