

Lent 5 (B) 16pt

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*God of order and unity, direct our thoughts and
actions to sharing your unfailing love with all we
encounter. In the name of your Son our Savior Jesus
Christ. Amen.*

Lent is a season that calls us to repentance, in which we change our vestments to purple, a color associated with mourning. It is a somber season, and this may resonate with many of us today. It has been couple of years since our worlds were completely changed by the pandemic, at time when we were called to adjust to new ways of gathering. A time of limiting in-person gatherings to protect each other and the most vulnerable. So much mourning and grieving. We all were changed, regardless of where you find yourself on this life journey.

And maybe this Lent, you decided to do some self-care or take on a specific spiritual practice. If you did, great! And if you did not, that's great, too! It is important to be kind to ourselves. It is important to be mindful of all those changes and feelings.

Current news and the social unrest of this past year have probably left us with the same request as the Greeks in today's gospel: "Sir, we wish to see Jesus."

Now, we do not know much about the Greeks in this story; Andrew and Philip did not know what to do, but Jesus made sure to respond.

Of course, right before this passage, many people had witnessed Jesus calling Lazarus from the tomb, so they wanted to meet and listen to this man. Lazarus was drawing crowds, and this understandably caused a lot of concern among many, including the religious authorities.

Similarly, I think that all that has been, and now is. going on the world has highlighted our desire to “see” or experience Jesus. We have come face-to-face with the ways in which our world continues to oppress, but it has also lifted new ways to correct what has been wrong for so long. Offering us a radically new future: Forgiving us for not listening to the voice of the Father. For not listening to the voices of those suffering. For perhaps trying to ignore the realities or experiences of those whom we label as outsiders. Allowing this sin to separate us from God and others.

Our recent past has allowed us to see what privilege looks like. And this has left us wondering what it looks like to serve the Father. Jesus says that those who serve must also follow. Let us understand that we are serving the Father by loving our neighbors, by listening to those voices telling us that they are not doing well. We are following Jesus by protecting our neighbors.

In our gospel reading, Jesus heard the voice. Some thought it was thunder and others an angel, but they all heard something. And like the crowd, we may sometimes confuse the voice, or even deny it. But Jesus reminds us that this voice is for our benefit. That we must pay close attention to what God is doing and saying.

This year has been one of much listening. We have heard the voices of so many. We have heard the stories of families and peoples in need. We have heard the voices of anger, despair, and rage. We have heard the voices of the marginalized, the once forgotten from all around the world.

What if we found God in these voices, too? Today, we can decide to be intentional about listening to these voices. We educate and inform ourselves in what matters to those who do not look or think like we do. We make space to welcome them into our lives, our communities, our churches, and our families. We welcome them in authentic ways that

leave nothing to the imagination – because our actions make clear statements that we embrace all.

As we come to the end of this Lenten season, can you stop and wonder where you have heard that voice? From whom the voice came? Or even with whom have you shared this voice?

In answering and understanding these voices, you will also find love. You find God. You find forgiveness. You find that even in the midst of chaos, there is love. Even in our struggle, we will find love. You hear God saying that you are enough – that listening to God's voice is transformative and healing.

Yes, it has felt like an extremely long season of Lent, but Easter is coming. We believe in a God who gives life. We believe that joy comes in the morning.

Perhaps you have been feeling like this unrest will never end. Although we are slowly coming to a new normal, we know that nothing will entirely go back to what it used to be – nor should it. Be reminded that the same Jesus who cried out with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” will do the same with us even when we don’t see it. Even now, God is calling us with a loud voice, saying, “Come out!”

Be reminded that we are not alone. Remember that God delights in our particularities and that God sees our struggles. God recognizes all of who we are and all of what we experience. We have the example in Jesus, who also offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the One who was able to save. Jesus is the example for us to follow. So, offer up your prayers, your loud cries and tears, knowing that God hears them, knowing that we belong to a God whose compassion blots out our offenses. We serve and follow a God who sees our transgressions and loves us the same.

May the God who saw your tears yesterday, and heard your silent prayers today, provide and care for you in ways that cannot yet be described. May the voice sustain you, may love guide every part of your life, and may the loving and liberating Son, our Savior Jesus Christ give you peace.

Amen.