

The Twelfth Sunday After Pentecost – 2021

Joshua 24:1-2a, 14-18

Ephesians 5:6-21

John 6:51-69

Who's in your ear? Who are you listening to? I was in Tennessee a few weeks ago. Remember, my folks were from the south and I grew up with a twang in my ear. I also say "y'all" with great frequency but when I stepped into a restaurant in Knoxville and a chipper young lass, the hostess, engaged me in light banter I knew that I was out of my element – she knew it too. "Yoouuu're not from aroouuuund here, are youu?" I replied: "However could you tell?"

My boys grew up playing soccer for a local club team. The coaches, the "trainers" were all English. There's a certain rhythm that invades your mind when you listen to an Englishman speak. It's contagious, infectious. Around that time of my life, folks would ask me where I was from. It isn't as though I said "Blimey" or asked where the "loo" was, it's that Martin and Lee and Kevin with their cockney accents had gotten into my head. I spent a good portion of the day yesterday listening to a man from South America. He said: "vaccin-aated" a number of times (it's become a common word but not the way that he said it). I think that it will be a week before I am able to pronounce it the American way.

Who's in your ear. It isn't just accents in our cosmopolitan world that influence us. Eve had Satan in her ear. How did that play out? When Moses went up Mount Sinai to speak with God, Aaron had the rabble of Israel in his ear. "Up, make us gods who will go before us. As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him" (Exodus 32:1). Aaron promptly made a golden calf. Venerating this idol, the people said: "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt" (Exodus 32:4). Who's in your ear? In our current situation, news networks have an outsized influence of people's outlook. What you listen to shapes your perspective. Fear has been stoked by some in the media and we are enduring the consequences of that action.

Who's in your ear? Some of what you listen to you can control; some of what you hear you can't control. Jesus has antagonists. His disciples are subject to these voices. Some are soft antagonists and some are rather militant. Each of those poses a certain danger to us. Jesus was teaching the crowds about the bread of life. The Twelve were there. Some of the Lord's antagonists break out their displeasure. "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" (John 6:52). Notice that they refuse to use Jesus' name. How can *this man* give us his flesh to eat? It is a pejorative, a put-down, a contemptuous reference to the One who is God of God and Light of Light. This is a soft antagonism that will become militant later in John's Gospel. People were opposed to Christ and His teaching then. People oppose Christ's church now. People oppose you personally because you are connected to Christ and His church. A soft antagonism is all around us. A soft antagonism can be just as deadly as a militant antagonism.

The Jews, in this instance, were carrying Satan's water. "Did this 'Rabbi' really say that He would give you His flesh to eat and His blood to drink?" The Jews laughed off Christ's teaching as preposterous. Shortly after, St. John tells us this: "When many of his disciples heard it, they said, 'This teaching is offensive. Who can bear to listen to him?'" (John 6:60). Jesus didn't

backpedal. Jesus didn't soften his teaching in order to make it more palatable to unbelief. He allows them to walk away. "After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him" (John 6:66).

Numerically, Christianity is dwindling in the United States of America. Why is that? Some in positions of authority, positions of influence, positions that come with a loud platform point to the low birth rate in America. Others point to the unhappy influence of secular culture, social media, a decadent, entertainment-based culture that breeds antipathy to Christianity. Does the Scripture ever promise continual growth in Christ's church? Is humanity perpetually free to turn its back on the Lord of the cross? What are we listening to? What's in our ear? What, personally, are you listening to? Who or what are you allowing access to your heart, your mind, your soul? "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ" (Romans 10:17). Mary listened to Gabriel, the angel sent from God with a message of truth, a message of hope, a message of the Savior. You will conceive. You will bear a son. The Holy Spirit will come upon you. This child will be the Son of the Most High. His kingdom will have no end. Mary listened. The Gospel was in her ear. And she believed. She believed and she conceived. "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me as you have said" (Luke 2:38).

What are you listening to? What is in your ear? How is it affecting your life, your faith, your joy, how is what you are listening to affecting your loved ones? People leave Christ's church because they stop hearing the word of God. People leave Christ's church because they prefer to hear something else. Faith flounders when it does not hear the Word of God. Our country is floundering. Ludicrous ideas are entertained because we have wooed foolishness and we have won her as a bride. "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God'" (Psalm 14:1). It is incumbent upon you, as a Christian, not to have fools in your ear. "We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5). The living voice of Jesus (the viva vox Jesu), that is what is to be in our ear. Our Lord, the One who saved you by His blood, said this: "If you abide/remain in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:31-32).

The many left and the twelve remained, with Christ. "After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. So, Jesus said to the Twelve, 'Do you want to go away as well?'" (John 6:66-67). It could have been an "Eeyore" moment. Eeyore is that Winnie the Pooh character (donkey) who is always pessimistic, gloomy, depressed. Peter could have adopted that disposition. "Oh, well, gee, I guess we'll stay. Maybe things will get better once you refine your message, once we make some headway with the fancy people, the important people, the powerful people." Peter had had Jesus in his ear. Peter had listened to the voice of the living God and Peter knew that nothing else was comparable. "Go? Where are we going to go? No one else has words like yours! Eternal life is in your teaching, your Word, your very person. If You tell us that You are the bread of life, we believe it. Your ways are not our ways. As the heavens are higher than the earth so are your ways higher than our ways (Isaiah 55:8). You liberate us from the world's foolishness, the world's vanity, and the world's blindness. "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God" (John 6:68-69).

The Word of God is our lifeline and we will not depart from it. The Word of God is our lifeline and we will not allow anyone take it from us. Christ's righteousness is found in this Word. Blood and redemption and love and peace – all the gifts of God's grace – are located in this Word. It makes us wise unto salvation (2 Timothy 3:15). It absolves us of the foolishness of our sin. It makes our hearts burn with glory of the crucified and risen King (Luke 24:32). God created by the power of this Word (John 1:3). The Holy Spirit attends God's Word and He livens our soul by His creative ministry. Death has no power of this Word. God's Word gives what it says – forgiveness, life and salvation. God's Word makes us holy. God's Word is a lamp to our feet (Psalm 119:105). God's Word shatters the darkness and brings light to the world (John 1:5). God's Word was made flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14). The flock of Christ the King hears His voice (John 10:4). He calls us each by name (John 10:3). We follow Him.