

“Selective Hearing”

John 6:35, 41-58

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My grandmother Browning lived to be ninety-six years old. She had a delightful sense of humor and quick wit. Her hearing was almost gone in her later years, or so we thought. Most of the time, she looked at the television or read while we carried on a conversation, ignoring what we had to say.

To our surprise, though, if we said something about her, she would speak up and make a comment. We realized she might not have been as hard of hearing as we thought; she just had selective hearing.

Do you know anyone who has selective hearing? If you are married or have children, I think you know the answer to this question. Actually, we all have it at times.

Are you tuning anyone out at this time in your life? Is someone telling you something you don't want to hear? How many ways has that person said it and for how long? Why do you refuse to take seriously what others are saying to you? What do you think you are missing?

These questions flowed out of today's text. The day after Jesus fed the five thousand, the people came looking for him again, which meant they traveled around the northern tip of the Sea of Galilee to Capernaum. I don't think this surprised Jesus because he knew human nature. The people were looking for more food, hoping he would also heal their diseases.

Jesus did not feed them breakfast that morning. Instead, he used the opportunity to feed their spirits.

“I am the bread of life,” he said to them. “Whoever comes to me will never be hungry and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe. All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me, I

will never drive away. For I have come down from heaven, not to do my will but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all 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 6:35-40.

You would think everyone would be eager to hear more, and I am confident most were. Some of the religious leaders in the crowd that day were not, though. Like their ancestors in the wilderness in Moses' day, they began grumbling, complaining and offering resistance.

"Then the Jews began to complain about him because he said, 'I am the bread that came down from heaven.' They were saying, 'Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I have come down from heaven?' " John 6:41-2.

Why didn't they want to hear what Jesus had to say? There appear to be two reasons.

They did not think he had the proper credentials. He was merely a common carpenter from humble beginnings who had no formal religious training.

What could he teach them? Who gave him the right to reinterpret the ancient scriptures, which they had studied all their lives?

In addition, they did not approve of what he was saying. It was clear he valued people over things, honesty over deceit, forgiveness over retaliation, integrity over popularity, generosity over greed, conversation over conflict, peace over war, transparency over secrecy, humility over arrogance, serving over being served, the power of love over the love of power and building bridges of goodwill and understanding over walls of suspicion and hate.

This was not their agenda and neither did they want it to be. Something had to be done to silence him, especially since the crowds listening to him were growing.

So, what did they do? They questioned his right to speak and did everything they could to undermine his ministry. When they failed to intimidate him and silence his voice, they killed him.

What did they miss? According to John, they missed a lot. For you see, Jesus knew God's heart better than anyone who had ever lived, and he also knew the human heart, the deepest yearnings of those who walked those dusty trails.

Five times in our text, John reminds his readers that Jesus came down from heaven, sent by God on a mission to help people understand who God is and God's dreams for the world. Five times!

Who knew the heart and nature of God better than Jesus? Who knew God's lofty dreams for mankind better than Jesus? Who knew how God wants every person to live and handle life's challenges, problems, temptations and disappointments better than Jesus? No one, absolutely no one.

But some did not want to hear what he had to say.

Seven times, John used the word flesh in our text in conjunction with Jesus. Seven times. Why?

He wanted his readers to understand that Jesus knew what it was like to live the lives they were living. He knew what worried them and kept them up at night. He knew the challenges they faced, the temptations they had to deal with, the dreams they had for themselves and their families, and the fears which relentlessly stalked them.

Jesus did not live in an ivory tower, removed from the everyday stressors of life. The "Word" really did become flesh and live among them, and they could trust him.

But not everybody did, especially those in leadership who were addicted to wealth and power and needed to control the masses, not help them. They shut him out of their lives by closing their ears, eyes, hearts and minds and missed a golden opportunity to make the world better while gaining the respect and trust of the people.

Let's not be too hard on the religious leaders of Jesus' time, though. **Do you have people around you saying things you do not want to hear?** Are they trying to warn you of danger? Do they want to talk to you about your values and priorities? Are they concerned about the friends you are running with, the decisions you are making, and the way you are behaving? Do they think you are not living up to your potential?

Why do you not want to hear what they have to say? Do you think they don't know what they are talking about? Do you think they don't understand your situation? Do you think they are trying to control you?

Of what are you afraid? Could you be living in denial? Are you being selfish or stubborn? Are you hiding something? Are you distracted?

Why do you think they have not given up? Could it be they love you too much to walk away and let you go? Do they love you more than you love yourself right now?

Could they be thinking back to a time in their life when someone did not give up on them? Maybe they have been where you are and want to help you like someone helped them.

What do you think you are missing by not listening? Like those who refused to listen to Jesus, could you be missing out on some meaningful dialogue about life and faith that could lead to substantial growth and maturity? Could you be overlooking the fact there are people around you who deeply love and care for you who want to help you with your struggles?

What do you think you should do? What would Jesus advise you to do?

What did Jesus want the religious leaders to do? I believe he wanted them to put down their defenses and listen to him with an open mind, which appears to be what Nicodemus did the night he sought out Jesus. Jesus would have treated them with the same respect and dignity he did Nicodemus and others, like the woman at the well.

How encouraging it would have been had the religious leaders sat down with Jesus and said, "What do you mean you are the bread of life come down from heaven? What do you know about God, life and faith that we don't? What is your concept of leadership? What do you think people need from us? How can we nourish their spirits and meet their needs the way you do? What motivates and inspires you? What is your source of wisdom, courage and strength?"

What a difference these questions could have made.

What difference would it make in your life if you talked to those who are reaching out to you? What would happen if you lowered your defenses and listened with an open mind? What if you suspended your understanding of truth long enough to see life from others' perspectives? Are you willing to set aside pride, denial, selfishness, indifference or cynicism to respond to those who care enough to reach out to you?

Why not begin by opening your heart to Jesus this morning? Ask him for wisdom and guidance. Talk to him about how to overcome those things which keep you from listening to others. Make the words of this chorus your prayer today.

Open the eyes of my heart, Lord; open the eyes of my heart.

I want to see you. I want to see you.

When you see him, I think you will see and hear others differently.

