

Series: It's a Seussical Life: Discovering Creative Ways to Live as God's Kids

Sermon #5: "Can You Hear?"

Book: *Horton Hears a Who*

Scripture: Luke 4:14-21

Text: "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world." -James 1:27

Sermon Blurb: Can you hear them? The quiet whispers all around us of those crying out for help. Oh, you may not be able to hear them with your ears. You may need to listen with your spiritual senses. But it is so important that you hear! This Sunday we'll listen with *Horton Hears a Who* and try to hear the voices of those we are called to help. When we do, we find that we hear the very voice of God!

Baptism: Ella Klemmensen

**PP#1:** It's a Seussical Life: Discovering Creative Ways to Live as God's Kids

"Can You Hear?"

"Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world." -James 1:27

It's a Seussical Life: Discovering Creative Ways to Live as God's Kids. "Can You Hear?" James 1:27, "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world."

**PP#2:** Mark 4 (CEV)

"21 He said to them, 'Do you bring in a lamp to put it under a bowl or a bed? Instead, don't you put it on its stand? 22 For whatever is hidden is meant to be disclosed, and whatever is concealed is meant to be brought out into the open. 23 If anyone has ears to hear, let them hear.'"

Jesus finishes a number of the parables He told with this curious phrase: "If anyone has ears to hear, let them hear." I've puzzled on that one for quite some time. What does it mean? After all, what else do ears do? They listen, right? They hear. So why does Jesus say this as the ending to some of His stories? "If anyone has ears to hear, let them hear."

Then it dawned on me. There's a difference between having ears and hearing. It's possible, for example, to have ears and not listen, right? Last week my wife told me I needed to pick up Nathan from football practice. She said, "*Remember, pick him up at 7:30 at the high school.*" Right. Pick him up, today, 7:30, don't forget. I was so proud, I remembered! At 7:30 I drove to the junior high, but found no one there. Hmmmm. I thought it through carefully: today...check, 7:30...check, pick up Nathan from football...check. But, no Nathan. They weren't still in the field. They weren't done early...Nathan wasn't waiting for me. Hmmmm.

**PP#3:** *Image of a lone football youth, waiting for a ride.*

Where could he be? So, I started driving around. Sure enough, there he was, alone with his coach, waiting for me long after everyone else left, at the *high school*.

When Reese got home, Nathan threw me under the bus: “Dad was sooo late that the coach had to wait with just me until Dad finally came.” So much for guys sticking together. Reese, ever so pleasantly, explained, “I specifically told you the high school, because they moved practice there for tonight.” You see, she said, “Remember, pick up Nathan at 7:30 AT THE HIGH SCHOOL.” I heard, “REMEMBER, PICK UP NATHAN AT 7:30 at the high school.”

I had ears, but I hadn’t quite heard.

There’s a difference, isn’t there, between hearing and hearing. We all say it, don’t we, all the time: Listen up! Pay attention! Hear what I’m saying. Just because we have ears doesn’t mean we’re listening, does it? “Those who have ears, let them hear.” Jesus was saying; you who have ears, don’t just listen to my words. Take them to heart. Do something about them!

**PP#4:** *Image for hearing and listening.*

We have trouble hearing, I think, as followers of Jesus. We have ears, but we struggle to hear. We struggle to hear God’s voice. Part of the problem is that we don’t know what God’s voice sounds like. People say to me, “If God would just tell me what to do, I would do it!” Well, we also believe that God has given us the Holy Spirit to speak into our hearts, and that God is always guiding us, helping us, speaking words of life into us, even if not by audible words. Hearing God is not a talent. It’s a skill. It’s something everyone can do. But it’s developed over time; it requires practice. It comes from listening for God’s voice, before, during, and after we act. It’s noticing what we heard, and then what happened. “You know, I asked God for clarity about my new job, and at first, I had a lot of anxiety, and worry about it. But then, after a while, I had this feeling that I just had to be patient. When I decided I would let God handle it, I had this peace that came over me. Of course, in the end, everything worked out, but not quite in the way I expected. But that anxiety and worry, that wasn’t God. The patience—although it was so hard—that was God.”

**PP#5:** *Image for hearing God’s voice.*

Or again, “I was offended by what my friend said to me. It irritated me, and I dwelled on it over and over again. I finally prayed asking God what to do about it. I wanted to just ignore it and be justified at being mad at her. But I had this idea that I needed to go and approach her about it. I didn’t want to do it, but that idea just wouldn’t go away. It would come into my head at odd times. It just came out of nowhere. Finally I approached her. It wasn’t a fun conversation, and I had to hear some things I didn’t want to hear, either. But in the end, it helped us both grow, and we are friends again. All along that was God’s voice, pushing me to go to her.”

Well, it takes going through this a few times before you begin to recognize when it’s God’s voice, and not just your own voice saying what you want. After a while you begin to get better at recognizing when it’s God’s voice. The more you do it, the better you get at it. It takes time and practice. That’s why one thing I often do is go ask a long-time Christian about my quandaries. They can pick up God’s voice much more quickly than I.

Who here has been a Christian for 50 years? Raise you hands. Raise your hands if you’ve been a Christian for 50 years. Thanks! You’ve just volunteered to let the rest of us come to you and ask you to help us discern God’s voice. We need your help!

**PP#6:** *Image for stopping to hear God.*

Part of the problem in hearing God's voice, however, may be that we're just not listening, either. We fail to stop and listen, to spend time in discernment. We are so rushed, that we end up making most of our decisions on the fly, in the moment. God is speaking to us, but we're not listening. The Bible talks about how God's voice is usually like a whisper. God rarely screams to get our attention. The voice is there, for sure, but we don't focus enough to hear it.

This, I think, is one of the most important functions of prayer. Praying is not just telling God all of our wants and problems. It's stopping to give our stuff to God, so that God has a chance to guide us on it. It's allowing for the time of reflection and listening. It's pushing our own feelings and preferences and wants to the side, and putting our focus on what God may be saying.

That's why prayer takes time, and we need to repeat our prayers. It's not just, "I've told God once, and I know He's not deaf." It's mentally putting that need or concern or issue before God, over and over again, and over time, you come to a sense, a peace, of what to do about it. Prayer requires patience. God usually, I have found, speaks slowly. I want a quick answer, right now. But God speaks quietly, slowly, forcing me to slow down and shift my focus. After all, faith is a relationship, not an answer!

But be careful! This is not an excuse to nurse worries or anxieties, hanging on to them rather than giving them over to God. Praying is a releasing of them, not stewing on them, stroking them. Take care to distinguish the difference.

This is also where devotions, and reading the Bible come in, too. It's a form of listening. When I have an issue before God, sometimes a point will just jump out at me from a devotion, or a thought or phrase will hit me from Scripture. It's like God puts it in bold, or highlighted. I can't help but notice it, if I have been praying it through.

Same with Christian friends and fellowship. Others say things that just kind of hit me. A friend will say in passing about his boss, "You know the best way to handle things is to go right up to him and talk it out." It'll wash over me and in my mind I'll hear, "See, I need to go to that person who offended me and talk it out." That's hearing God's voice.

**PP#7: Can you hear?**

1. Hearing God's voice takes practice  
"Those who have ears, let them hear!" -Jesus

Now, I've spent quite a bit of time on this because so many of us really struggle to hear God's voice. And I want you to know it's a skill, not a talent. You have to develop it. It takes time. It takes practice. But everyone can do it.

Those who have ears, let them hear!

**PP#8: *Image of Horton listening to the speck on the clover.***

In the Seuss story today, Horton, the big elephant, hears voices so faint that no one else can hear them. It's a whole village of Whos so tiny that they all live on a speck of dust. Now, it's Horton's extra big ears that allow him to hear such extra small voices. But he can hear their cry for help.

In Horton, Dr. Seuss has given us a delightful image to help us picture what a Christian is supposed to be like. Not only are we to develop big ears to hear God's voice, we are to develop big ears to hear the voices of others that God wants us to hear. We need to learn to listen like God listens.

You see, our world is a noisy world. It's full of sounds and words that compete for our attention. Most of the time the voices we choose to hear speak about what we want to hear. It's about our day, our lives, our concerns, our needs, our wounds, our irritations, our likes and dislikes, our schedules, our busyness.

But as Christians, we take on the work and ministry of Jesus. Jesus calls us to lift our focus off of ourselves, and start engaging the needs of those around us. It's an other-person focus.

Jesus explained what His ministry was. Early on, He went back to His home town and told everyone what His life's work was. Let's take a look at Luke 4, starting with verse 14.

**PP#9-10: Luke 4 (CEV)**

14 Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and news about Him spread throughout the whole countryside. 15 He taught in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

16 Jesus went to Nazareth, where He had been raised. On the Sabbath He went to the synagogue as He normally did and stood up to read. 17 The synagogue assistant gave Him the scroll from the prophet Isaiah. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

18 The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me.  
He has sent me to preach good news to the poor,

to proclaim release to the prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind,

to liberate the oppressed, 19 and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

20 He rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the synagogue assistant, and sat down. Every eye in the synagogue was fixed on Him. 21 He began to explain to them, "Today, this scripture has been fulfilled just as you heard it."

"Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and news about Him spread throughout the whole countryside. He taught in their synagogues and was praised by everyone. [So, He has become quite popular. People are listening to Him. So, what was He up to? What was His ministry? Verse 16,] Jesus went to Nazareth, where He had been raised. On the Sabbath He went to the synagogue as He normally did [Stop there for a minute. Did you catch that? It was Jesus' custom to go to the synagogue *each week* for worship. There's a guideline for us. If Jesus went to worship every week with others in God's larger family, we need to as well! We need to make it our custom to go to church weekly when possible, too. It's important. We need to consistently keep grounded in God, and part of that comes through corporate worship. You want to have that spiritual strength like Jesus? Then go to worship like Jesus! OK, moving on, verse 16] On the Sabbath He went to the Synagogue as He normally did and stood up to read. The synagogue assistant gave Him the scroll from the prophet Isaiah. [They had been reading through the Bible together. Another great practice we need to do consistently.] He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me. He has sent me to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind, to liberate the oppressed, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.' He rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the synagogue assistant, and sat down. Every eye in the synagogue was fixed on Him. He began to explain to them, 'Today, this scripture has been fulfilled just as you heard it.'"

Jesus turned to a prophesy from old and said, today, this is being fulfilled right here in me. This is what I'm doing. This is what I'm all about.

What was the prophesy? It was to hear the voices of those in need, the poor, the trapped, the blind, the oppressed. It was to bring help to those the world overlooks. God sees them. God loves them and wants them helped. Jesus came to bring help for those in need.

God's people carry on this work. Jesus entrusted it into the ears and hands of His disciples. He did what none of us can do. He broke the power of evil, of sin, of death. But there is more to be done. That He handed off to His followers, guided and powered by the Holy Spirit.

**PP#11:** Can you hear?

1. Hearing God's voice takes practice
2. Hearing the voice of the ignored

“Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.” -James 1:27

That means that we, as Jesus-followers, need to focus our hearing. We need to hear those that the world ignores. James says that “religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.” True religion is looking after those who are powerless, and stop living for yourself!

The story goes that a number of years ago a student applied to be an usher at the local theater. During the interview, the manager asked an important question, “Son, what would you do if we had a crowded theater and a fire broke out?” The student thought for a minute and then answered, “Well, you don't have to worry about me. You don't have to worry about me at all. If it's a crowded theater and a fire breaks out, I would find a way to get out safely, no problem.”

Not quite what the manager was looking for. He didn't want the student to just care about himself. He wanted to know how he would hear the needs of the people and help them.

We're like Horton: we can hear the cry for help. It takes focus. It takes intentionality. It takes perseverance. Who is God calling you to hear? Who are your Whos?

**PP#12:** Can you hear?

1. Hearing God's voice takes practice
2. Hearing the voice of the ignored
3. Ignoring the voices of the heard (herd)

“Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.” -James 1:27

Loud voices gather around Horton. You are ridiculous! Stop being so foolish! Especially Jane Kangaroo, who leads the loud voices like a herd to tell Horton to stop hearing.

Church, you need to name the fact that there are loud voices calling you away from the work God wants from you. Jane Kangaroo may even be our own voices: “I just want to stay mad at her!” But as James says, “keep your from being polluted by the world”...the voices of the world, the voices of “stop,” the voices of “don't be ridiculous,” the voices of “that's foolish.”

Listening to the voices of the ignored, means learning to ignore some of the loud voices.

Two more points.

**PP#13:** Can you hear?

1. Hearing God's voice takes practice
2. Hearing the voice of the ignored
3. Ignoring the voices of the heard (herd)

#### 4. Hearing because they are important

“You are precious and honored in my sight, and I love you” -Isaiah 43:4

The Whos are so small, no one else hears them. But Horton says over and over again, “A person’s a person, no matter how small.” Even the smallest deserve to be heard, and noticed, and helped. Their size, their importance, doesn’t matter. They are important to God, who hears them, and who calls us to hear them, too.

Today we’ve had a baptism. Cute Ella is so small, so vulnerable. She needs lots of care. And we’ve committed to care for her, and others like her. Church, that means stop doing so much of what you want to do, and start doing more of the help the voices call for. Consider a moment: how many hours of your day do you spend on yourself. How many hours do you spend on your Whos? Or consider over a week? My guess is that we need to increase our hours on others! Horton is our image. He picked through millions of clover, all night long, to help the invisible Whos. They are that important!

#### **PP#14:** Can you hear?

1. Hearing God’s voice takes practice
2. Hearing the voice of the ignored
3. Ignoring the voices of the heard (herd)
4. Hearing because they are important
5. Being heard because you are important

“And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’” -Matthew 25:40

Well, the story comes to a climax with the herd of animals about to throw the clover and dust and the Whos into boiling oil. Horton begs all the Whos to make all the noise they can, just so others can hear them. All the Whos are shouting all they can, but it’s just not enough. They need just a little bit more. The mayor looks everywhere and notices his son, tiny and forgotten JoJo is not yelling with the rest of the village. The Whos need to learn the same lesson! Even though he is small and forgotten, JoJo is just the little extra voice needed for the sound to finally break through and be heard by the other animals around Horton.

We need to hear the forgotten voice, AND we also need to speak up as a tiny voice. We may not think we are important, or not significant, or that we can’t do much good. “What can I do? It seems so insignificant? There are so many needs. I just can’t make a dent. Why try?”

But one of the great things about being a Jesus follower, is that we are not alone. We are led and powered by the Holy Spirit, and we join with all the other followers of Jesus in listening and responding to the cries for help. We are not a lone voice. Rather, we add our voice to the growing rumble around. It’s like being part of the wave at the stadium, or the roar at a concert. It’s being a part of the assembly line on a sandbagging crew, or joining a mission team going out to make a difference.

This Saturday our church is hosting our monthly food distribution. It happens, month after month, because a bunch of small voices gather together. Last month we provided food for 170 families. And we were short-handed. We needed more help. Are there any more tiny voices out there, willing to show up? We need help unpacking the truck. We need help repacking the food. We need help pushing grocery carts, handing out food, cleaning up and folding chairs. We need help repairing

cars, cooking food, teaching about budgeting, sitting with people just to talk with them, to show them they're important.

Are you an insignificant voice? Then you can make a difference! There are so many ways!

"Those who have ears, let them hear."

How about you? How is your hearing?

**PP#15:** *Image of Horton hearing the speck.*

"Then he heard it again! Just a very faint yelp,

As if some tiny person were calling for help.

'I'll help you,' said Horton, "But who are you? Where?"

He looked and he looked. He could see nothing there.

But a small speck of dust blowing past through the air."

Amen.