

First Friends Church, a Quaker Meeting
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Do You Hear What I Hear?
Luke 8:4-15, Luke 10:23-24, Isaiah 9:6

Luke 8:4-15

The Parable of the Sower

⁴ While a large crowd was gathering and people were coming to Jesus from town after town, he told this parable: ⁵ “A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path; it was trampled on, and the birds ate it up. ⁶ Some fell on rocky ground, and when it came up, the plants withered because they had no moisture. ⁷ Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up with it and choked the plants. ⁸ Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up and yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown.”

When he said this, he called out, “Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear.”

⁹ His disciples asked him what this parable meant. ¹⁰ He said, “The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God has been given to you, but to others I speak in parables, so that,

‘though seeing, they may not see;
though hearing, they may not understand.’

¹¹ “This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is the word of God. ¹² Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. ¹³ Those on the rocky ground are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away. ¹⁴ The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life’s worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature. ¹⁵ But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.

Luke 10:23-24

Then turning to the disciples, Jesus^[a] said to them privately, “Blessed are the eyes that see what you see! ²⁴ For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it.”

Isaiah 9:6

For a child has been born for us,
a son given to us;
authority rests upon his shoulders;
and he is named
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace

Message: Do You Hear What I Hear?

In the reading from Luke 8 this morning we hear about 4 different kinds of people who hear the word of God. How it is received is dependent on circumstance and experience. And in the three verses following this parable Jesus declares that He came to reveal the truth and not to hide it. And proceeds to caution us that upon hearing that truth that there is a responsibility with what you do with that truth after having heard it.

It reminds me of a story I once heard. Back when the telegraph was the fastest method of long-distance communication, a young man applied for a job as a Morse code operator. Answering an ad in the newspaper, he went to the office that was listed. When he arrived, he entered a large, busy office filled with noise and clatter, including the sound of the telegraph in the background.

A sign on the receptionist's counter instructed job applicants to fill out a form and wait until they were summoned to enter the inner office. The young man filled out his form and sat down with the seven other applicants in the waiting area.

After a few minutes, the young man stood up, crossed the room to the door of the inner office, and walked right in. Naturally the other applicants perked up, wondering what was going on. They muttered among themselves that they hadn't heard any summons yet. They assumed that the young man who went into the office made a mistake and would be disqualified.

Within a few minutes, however, the employer escorted the young man out of the office and said to the other applicants, "Gentlemen, thank you for coming, but the job has just been filled."

The other applicants began grumbling to each other, and one spoke up saying, "Wait a minute, I don't understand. He was the last to come in, and we never got a chance to be interviewed. Yet he got the job. That's not fair!"

The employer said, "I'm sorry, but the last several minutes while you've been sitting here, the telegraph has been ticking out the following message in Morse code. 'If you understand this message, then come right in. The job is yours.' None of you heard it or understood it. This young man did. The job is his."

It is a fact, we do not all hear the same things in the same way. Just as the sower in our parable scattered seed that fell on many different paths we too, come from different places of understanding and backgrounds. How we've been nurtured, the things we've been taught and our experiences, both good and bad, and medical conditions, along with the other sounds vying for our attention, all play into the way we listen and what we really hear.

Today is the second Sunday of Advent; Advent can be a powerful reminder of what was, what is and what is still to come. Today is a time to proclaim and celebrate God's Peace.

John 14:27 quotes Jesus as saying "My Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. And in Philippians 4:7: And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus

And while we may know these words to be true it is sometimes impossible not to be afraid, troubled or distraught. It is then, that the spirit speaks to us in whispers or shows us something unexpected to remind us that God is still speaking and near.

That's what happened to Noël Regney and Gloria Shayne Baker in 1962. The couple had been commissioned to compose a B side for a Christmas single by Columbia Records.

Noel is quoted as saying “I had thought I’d never write a Christmas song: Christmas had become so commercial.” And he wasn’t particularly interested in a commercialized Christmas nor was he a very religious person.

But the tense political climate at the time due to the threat of nuclear war inspired him to write a musical plea for peace (a peace prayer) instead.

At the height of the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, composer Noel Regney battled depression and flashbacks from his time in World War II. As he walked through the streets of Manhattan, the weight of despair in his heart reflected on the unsmiling faces of the people that he passed on the street. A war of words and maneuvers called the Cold War held the world in an icy grip, with the United States and the Soviet Union the principal combatants. During these last two weeks in October 1962, the United States and the Soviet Union were heating the Cold War to the nuclear boiling point in a confrontation over the Soviet Union installing missiles capable of striking most of the continental United States in Cuba, just 90 miles away. History labeled this confrontation the Cuban Missile Crisis.

As he continued his walk to his home in Manhattan, he saw two mothers with their babies in strollers. The little angels were looking at each other and smiling.” and his mood lifted from despair and thought in that one moment he felt that God had given men a chance for true peace. This inspired the first line of the song: “Said the night wind to the little lamb

The horrors of war were something he knew all too well. As a teenager in occupied France during World War II, he was conscripted into the Nazi army, eventually fleeing to fight with the French resistance. Noel felt terrified for his family, his country, and for the

survival of the human race. He had fought in World War II and had experienced the fear and terror of war and death first hand.

Artfully couched in the iconic nature of the Christian nativity, the songwriters were making a political statement: a plea for peace, and a reminder of the ravages of war.

“Said the night wind to the little lamb ... the lamb being a long standing literary symbol of peace.

"A star, a star, dancing in the sky//with a tail as big as a kite." "The star was meant to be in reference to a Missile or bomb,"

Later we hear the lyrics "A child, a child, shivers in the cold," which is said as a reference to the "real children" who inspired the song. The mention of The Child makes the song Christian, of course. But when there's the command for "people everywhere" to pray for peace, the significance is beyond any one religion.

And the line, "Let us bring him silver and gold" was a reference to "poor children," — a reminder of the human cost of war.

But no matter how you interpret the song, Noël Regney and Gloria Shayne Baker left no mistake about the central message at the climax of the song.

"The biggest part for them was the 'pray for peace people everywhere' line,"

For those who did not live through the Cuban Missile Crisis, the context may not be immediately evident. Instead, what we hear is a spiritual story that begins along the lines of the Christmas story in Luke. The lamb communicates its wonder to a shepherd boy: again, shepherds are a traditional element of the Luke narrative, the angels' song did indeed echo through the night, and all is proceeding as expected. The birth of “a child, a child, shivering in the cold,” does indeed challenge every worldly monarch, every

political and social system, and in the child is God's promise that God will bring goodness and light. The shepherd boy then speaks to "the mighty king" but which King, certainly not Herod. Perhaps he is putting the magi in position to be anti-Herod figures.

In 1962 the world was in desperate need for people of wisdom who would listen with ears to hear and had the courage to overcome Cold War tensions and achieve peace. Today, we have other needs, other structures that need challenging, and other identities that need to align themselves with the values of the child who became known as Wonderful Counselor. Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

The Christmas baby doesn't belong in the manger, but out and about, challenging and changing our lives, our thoughts and our habits — and our hearts.

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