

September 8, 2019: Listening is very important! [Mk. 4: 1-20]

Dear Listeners,

We are going to read in the account of the gospel of Mark again; this time we turn to chapter 4. That's where we read a story, a parable, the Lord Jesus told his audience; it was a very familiar story to his audience, namely about farming, sowing. Although we may not be farmers ourselves, we know what sowing by the farmer means, and we know the intent: a harvest. Every farmer who wants to have a good crop knows what he needs: a fertile soil. That's why he plows the land, takes out the weeds, the thorns and thistles. The Lord Jesus tells this story with the same intent: he is looking for a good harvest, for fertile soil. Yet, we realize that Jesus doesn't just tell stories; he wants to say something with it, teach his audience a lesson. Later on the disciples ask him why he told this story. That's when Jesus shows them how important it is that we listen well!

We all know dear listeners, what listening is: listening to your parents, your boss, to radio or TV, to the birds, etc. Yes, then it's also important that you listen to the Voice of the Church today. Listening has an impact on us, good or bad, with a positive effect or a negative result. We know that from the outcome, from what they do, the people to whom we spoke. Listening is very important indeed! That's what the Lord Jesus wants to show with this parable too. You can see that when the disciples asked him why he told this story about the sowing. Then Jesus refers to a saying by the prophet Isaiah, "They may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand, lest they should turn and be forgiven."

Why does Jesus quote the prophet Isaiah? Does he not want people to listen and understand; listen and do what he says? Well, the Lord Jesus recognizes in the people that have followed him so far the same response and attitude as Isaiah did in his time. Isaiah had to prophesy God's Word to the people of his time, the judgment of God. People didn't do anything with Isaiah's words; they listened perhaps but they didn't respond, or they reacted negatively, angrily. That's when God tells them through his prophet Isaiah: they will know what you're talking about but not understand; they'll hear but not repent. That's what the Lord Jesus wants to illustrate here too. Why? Well, you will see why when you consider what has happened upon the words and works of the Lord Jesus. You can read about that in the chapters 1-4 of the gospel according to Mark.

When the Lord Jesus started out preaching and teaching, people were drawn to him in great numbers: he proclaimed the coming of the kingdom of God and called people to repentance and faith in the good news he proclaimed. Jesus called a special group of disciples to follow him so that they would hear and see everything he would do in his ministry. His deeds were amazing people thought, healing as he did, teaching with authority, casting out demons too. However, quite soon already there is resistance as well, especially among the leaders: he claims he can forgive sins, he heals on the Sabbath, he eats with sinners, and he draws the people away from them. Then they slander him; even his own family gets desperate with him; and the Lord Jesus starts judging them. That's how it appeared clearly how different the reactions were among the people!

Now that, dear listeners, Jesus wants to illustrate with this parable about the sowing! The sower sows the word; the sower is Jesus who is going around preaching and teaching the good news of the kingdom of God. That's when it becomes apparent what the soil is like in which this seed is falling: is the heart rock-hard, or filled with thorns and thistles, then it's no wonder that it's choked, fruitless; while the seed that falls in the fertile soil (like in the disciples' hearts) it bears fruit! All those people are listening to him (and to his disciples later on when Jesus sends them away as well) but with what effect? How are they listening? That's an important question with you too, dear listener: how are you listening: indifferently or attentively, interestingly or critically, half-heartedly? Then the seed (the message) won't land well. What happens however when you listen well, listen to God speaking to you in the message, when the seed falls in fertile soil? Yes, then there will be fruit, faith and repentance! Then you're going to examine your life, consider your attitude, and realize that change is called for!

You must understand well, dear listener that Jesus' purpose is a call for you to listen well! Jesus truly wanted people to heed his teaching and preaching and be saved! He is the way, the truth, and the life, and he is the only way of salvation and the only name given under heaven by which you can be saved! That's why his teaching is as sharp as it is, and as unsettling perhaps! That's his love indeed; his desire that you listen and believe in him! That's why his message comes with such great power. His word is powerful, as you can see from the effects it had on the sick, the demons, the raging storm; his word is powerful still and will not return without effect! This effect, however, could be different from the one or the other: faith and repentance, or hardening and rejection. It's so important that you listen well. God is at work through your listening, your obeying, and your responding! That all depends in what soil the seed of the word is sown: a rocky soil, a hard path, a patch of thorns and thistles, or fertile ground that receives the sown word and produces fruit!

When the word that you hear through the Voice of the Church, dear listener, falls in good soil, in a receptive heart, it will take root in there. Then it will grow in you, and it will deepen your life and make it flourish. That's when you become a disciple of the Lord Jesus in whose heart the word takes root, bears fruit, and in whose life you see that you belong to him. That's when you are a Christian, a disciple who starts to show the image of Jesus Christ. That's when the apostle Paul says, "It's no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me." Hence the question is very important, dear listener: what are you doing with the message of God's Word? What are you doing with the message of Jesus, with his mighty deeds of healing, restoring, and renewing the lives of those who heed his word and believe in him? Do you open your heart for that word of God so that it can work in you? Are you eager to hear that word and bear fruit, be renewed by his Holy Spirit to a new creation? You know, that's how God worked in the beginning too: God spoke and it stood there; the trees, the birds, the animals, etc. God still works that way by speaking his word: he wants to touch your heart, your life, and your hope in life! He wants to save you from sin and death, and he does his work of salvation by the proclamation of his word! Then it's so important how well you listen, also today!