

# I Hear You Saying...

Luke 13:10-17

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This is a sermon about being attentive, and acting upon what we notice.

When we were studying pastoral care at the seminary, we were taught basic listening skills. Listening, after all, is the beginning of caring. Listening—truly listening—is a healing art.

One way to let somebody you know that you've heard them is by reflecting back to them what you think they said. You might use a mechanical response by saying, "I hear you saying..." and then share what you've heard. If you've heard correctly, your friend will nod. They'll say, "Yes, you heard me correctly." If you're a little off, they'll correct you. The point is, when you care for somebody, you really want to be attentive to them. You want to hear them.

It might work like this:

The parishioner says: "I'm afraid of my first day on the job."

The would-be pastor says: "***I hear you saying*** you're afraid of your first day on the job."

The parishioner says: "Well, no, that's not what I mean to say. I'm *excited* about my first day on the job."

The would-be pastor says: "Ah. ***I hear you saying*** you're excited about your first day on the job."

You see how that works.

We'd practice this pattern in and out of class. We'd reflect back on what we heard by saying, "I hear you saying..." And this became a joke for us busy seminarians. Somebody at the dinner table would excuse themselves. "I'm going back for more iced tea."

And we'd say, "***I hear you say*** you're going back for more iced tea."

We'd often get it wrong on purpose.

"I'm going back for more iced tea."

***I hear you saying*** that your life is meaningless and empty and you keep trying to fill it with stuff that doesn't matter, stuff like caffeine."

It was a joke, and we had fun with it.

But listening well and being tuned-in is no joke. Attentive listening is the first and essential part of caring. You can't *understand* without first having *heard*.

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So, often in the gospels it appears that people just aren't listening to or hearing Jesus. They're there but not there. They aren't being attentive. They are clearly and widely missing the point.

Such is the case in this text. Jesus sees a woman at the synagogue who is crippled. She's been crippled a long time. She can't stand up straight. Jesus sees her pain. Jesus imagines what those crippled years might have been like. Jesus imagines the burden. And what does he do? He heals her with a word and a touch.

But the Pharisees don't acknowledge the miracle that just happened. They don't seem to notice or care that a woman bent over double has been healed. They don't seem to notice or care that Jesus's love is such that it releases people from a life of bondage. All the Pharisees notice is that Jesus broke the law by healing on the sabbath.

And they are completely missing the point. Instead of entering into the holy work that Jesus is doing, they cross their arms and discount it.

We do this nowadays when somebody has a brilliant idea and we shoot it down with a question that is not of primary importance: *How much is it going to cost?* (That's an important question for later; it's a lousy first-response.) Instead of entering into the holy work of imagination, we are crossing our arms and digging in our heels. *We've never done it that way before. Who has time for more work?* We shoot down the dream as soon as it lifts off the ground.

Sadly, I'm guilty of this.

Here the Pharisees are missing the point. They are not being attentive to what God is doing in their midst. They are closing their minds to God's work. They aren't hearing the angels sing.

Instead of saying, "*Wow! Jesus, you have some power. We are religious people. We love God, we really do. But we can't do what you do. That woman must feel such tremendous relief. And you healed her free of charge, no strings attached. We've heard about grace, but in your work today, we're seeing grace in action.*"

The Pharisees don't say, "Thank you," or "We're amazed," or, even, "We're jealous."

The Pharisees don't say, "*I heard you say to that woman that she was set free from her ailment. I saw her stand up straight. I heard her sigh. I saw the relief on her face.*"

Nope.

The Pharisees act as if they see none of it.

Instead, they complain that Jesus is guilty of breaking the Fourth Commandment; they charge that, by working, he's not honoring God by keeping the sabbath holy.

Luke as a storyteller deftly follows their lead but he doesn't allow them to derail the story. Luke tells us how Jesus beats the Pharisees at their own game. Jesus calls them hypocrites. *You water your animals on the sabbath, and that's work. So it is that I healed a woman on the sabbath. Acts of mercy, both yours and mine, are allowed on the sabbath. Nothing is broken when the gospel is being attempted. Doing holy work on the sabbath doesn't break the commandment, but fulfills it.*

And then Luke brings the whole exchange back into proper focus. The crowd saw the holy work God was doing through Jesus. The crowd saw, heard, and was attentive to the ministry of Jesus. And, naturally, they were astounded.

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We are invited not to be sidetracked by the Pharisee's lack of attentiveness. We are invited to pay attention, to notice, to be astounded. Notice that God in Christ has the power to heal. Notice that God's grace comes with no strings attached. Jesus takes time for us. Jesus notices. Jesus cares. Jesus transforms. Jesus liberates us from the bondage of pain, of brokenness, of life's ruts.

This text invites us to notice those in the crowd in our modern day who can use a touch. The text invites us to care for those who have been ignored. This text invites us to hope for wholeness for everybody, and to do our part in touching the pain of the world with God's peace, taking the time to reach out, with our hands.

The poet John Bell looks at scenes like this in the gospels, and imagines God calling out from them:

*Will you let the blinded see if I but call your name?  
Will you set the prisoners free and never be the same?  
Will you kiss the leper clean and do such as this unseen,  
and admit to what I mean in you and you in me?*

*"God, in the touching love of your son, Jesus, **I hear you** inviting me to be a disciple. **I hear you saying** that you love the world and you want me to love it, too. **I hear you saying**, "Love is the answer." **I hear you saying**, that your power can transform an ordinary touch into an extraordinary experience. **I hear you saying** you will not tolerate exclusion. **I hear you saying** you want people to be free from brokenness in order that they might be free to love. **I hear you saying** wholeness is your plan for all creation. **I hear you saying**, "Follow me and allow me to use you to heal the world."*

In this scene today in Luke's gospel, if we are attentive to it, we see Jesus modeling attentiveness. We see him listening, noticing, caring. He's reaching out with healing love. If we really look closely, we see that Jesus has given us arms to use for that very same, holy purpose.

AMEN.