

## McCabe United Methodist Church

“The Courage to Listen (part 2 of 4)”

Luke 1:26-39: December 8, 2013

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Did you hear about Ole and Lena? They were sitting down drinking their morning cup of coffee listening to the weather report on the radio. It said, **“There will be three to five inches of snow today and a snow emergency has been declared. You must park your cars on the odd-numbered side of the streets.”**

Ole got up from his coffee and parked his car on the odd-numbered side of the street.

Two days later, again they were both sitting down with their morning cups of coffee and they heard this radio weather forecast: **“There will be two to four inches of snow today and a snow emergency has been declared. You must park your cars on the even-numbered side of the streets.”**

Again, Ole got up and went and parked his car on the even-numbered side of the street.

Three days later, once again they were both sitting down with their coffee and they heard this weather forecast: **“There will be six to eight inches of snow today and a snow emergency has been declared. You must park your cars on the . . . .”** and then the power went out and Ole didn't get the rest of the instructions.

He said to Lena, **“Jeez, now what am I going to do, Lena?”**

Lena replied, **“Aw, Ole, just leave the car in the garage.”**

Are you a good listener? My wife was telling me about a TV program she watched the other day. They were talking about divorce. Do you know what the number one cause of divorce is today? It's the lack of communication.

People aren't talking or listening to each other. So again, what about you? Are you a good listener?

Maybe you heard about the two psychiatrists who ran into each other at their 20th college reunion. They were both the same age. The one psychiatrist was vibrant and full of energy, while the other one looked tired, run-down and old.

**“So what's your secret,”** the tired looking psychiatrist asked? **“Listening to other people's problems every day, all day long, for years on end, has made me into a tired, old man.”**

**“Well,”** the energetic psychiatrist replied, **“I don't listen!”**

Listening to other people is hard to do. Listening to God is even harder.

The Bible has a lot to say about listening. In Deuteronomy 30, God tells the people of Israel to **“listen to his voice.”** In John 10, Jesus said, **“My sheep listen to my voice.”** And in James, we're told, **“Everyone should be quick to listen.”**

God speaks. God talks. But, do we listen?

In Marjorie Kellogg's book, *Tell Me That You Love Me Junie Moon*, Junie Moon

says to her husband Arthur, **“The trouble, Arthur, with you is that you seldom listen to me, and when you do you don’t hear, and when you do hear you hear wrong, and even when you hear right you change it so fast that it’s never the same.”**

How many of us listen to God in the same way? We hear, but we don’t. Or, we hear, but we hear wrong. Or, we hear, but we hear what we want to hear. Or, we just don’t hear, period.

This is the second message in an Advent series about courage. Last week, we talked about the *Courage to Believe*. The *Courage to Believe* in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. The *Courage to Believe* that Jesus died for us and has plans for us.

Today, we’re going to talk about the *Courage to Listen*. If we believe in Jesus. If we believe that Jesus is our Lord and Savior. If we believe that Jesus died for us and has plans for us. Then, don’t you think he might be worth listening to?

Mary listened to Gabriel, the angel, 2,000 years ago. God had sent Gabriel to break the good news to her about Jesus and how she was going to be his mother.

For God’s plan to work, Mary had to believe that God actually speaks to people, even people like her. She had to have the courage to both believe and listen.

I wonder how many people today believe that God still speaks or talks?

One of the hardest lessons I teach my confirmation students is about prayer. **“Prayer,”** I tell them, **“is both talking and listening. Mostly, listening! There is a reason why God gave us only one mouth and two ears! It’s to do more listening than talking.”**

It takes *Courage to Listen*. Especially, it takes *Courage to Listen* to God.

Courage. What if God asks you to do something? What if God asks you to help someone? What if God asks you to mend a broken relationship? What if God has some news for you? What if God asks you to help make your corner of the world a little better?

How will you know if you don’t listen? It takes *Courage to Listen*, doesn’t it?

God still speaks today. God speaks to us today through prayer and through reading the Bible. God speaks to us through the Holy Spirit and through other people and through nature and through music and through tragedy and through victory and through work and through all kinds of ways, but we have to have the *Courage to Listen*.

If we don’t listen, if we don’t believe that God still talks to us, then we miss out on an important part of our relationship with God.

Let’s try an experiment. It’s a listening experiment. Please sit back. Close your eyes. Get comfortable. Put away all your distractions and concentrate on listening. Picture Jesus sitting next to you. Picture him looking into your eyes. He might have his hand on your shoulder. Can you see him? Can you hear? What is he saying to you? Listen.

There is no magic involved in listening to Jesus. Like Mary, it’s a matter of courage. The courage to believe and the courage to listen.

A woman was in a second hand store looking for material to make Christmas costumes for her church’s Christmas program. Like a lot of us, she was in a hurry.

As she was looking around, she noticed a mother and her little girl walk into the store. It was cold outside, but neither one was dressed very well. They both had on coats that were too thin, gloves with too many holes in them, and boots that had seen too many better days.

The woman noticed the mother and daughter walk up to a rack of clothes. The little girl saw a pretty red blouse that she wanted to buy for her older sister. **"No,"** the mother said, **"we can't afford that today."** The cost was a \$1.50.

She continued to watch and saw the mother and daughter walk up to a stack of books. **"Look, mom,"** the little girl said, **"I bet Joey would like this book."**

**"No,"** the mother said, **"we can't afford that today."** The cost was 25 cents.

Then, she saw the mother and daughter looking at some Christmas decorations. **"Mom,"** the little girl said, **"Look. An angel. Can we buy it? It would look great on our table."**

**"No,"** the mother said one more time, **"we can't afford that today."** The cost was 75 cents.

The lady, the one who was looking for material, wasn't looking for material any more. Instead, she was listening to a voice . . . a voice she hadn't heard in a long, long time. And we all know what this voice was saying to her, don't we? The voice kept saying, **"go on and do it. Go on and do it."**

And she did. She bought the blouse, the book, and the little angel and she told the clerk who they were for. She also bought two warm coats and gloves. The total cost was \$21.50. She didn't want to embarrass the mother and so she asked the clerk to give them to the mother and her daughter.

It was good enough for her to hear that voice again. This time it said to her, **"you did well. You did well."**

When is the last time you said to Jesus, **"How can I help you today? What do you want me to do today?"** And then, you listened. You actually listened.

Only you have the power to hear Jesus for yourself. I can't tell you what Jesus is saying to you any more than you can tell me what Jesus is saying to me. I can only say this, **"Jesus still speaks. Jesus still talks."**

Do we have the *Courage to Listen?*