

**August 28, 2022 Twelfth Sunday After Pentecost
Ladue Chapel Presbyterian Church
Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Ephesians 3:14-19
“Heartfulness”
Anne Peacock**

“I don’t know how to pray.” I’ve heard this many times over the years, from others as well as myself. There is no right or wrong way. All of life can be a prayer. The spiritual life is simply living and moving in every present moment, wherever we are, and in whatever we do. God, our Creator and Source, is as close as our own breath. If we are too wordy with our prayers, trying to fit everything in, we miss the space between the words. The Spirit lives in the space between the words.

Today’s passage from the letter to the Ephesians seems to offer this space. It describes the many dimensions of God, the beauty of Christ dwelling in our hearts through faith, being rooted in love and filled with all the fullness of God. One of the ways we may come to know the breadth, length, height, and depth of God more fully is by looking for God in everything. All of life can be a prayer, anytime and anywhere, but we must learn and practice the art of pausing and noticing, offering God an opportunity to speak to us. Where do you hear God? Where do you see God?

Flowers. Maybe flowers touch a part of us that we cannot express. The flowers here today are an art and a discipline arranged by a master of ikebana. Ikebana is a Japanese style of floral art representing heaven, earth, and humanity through an intentional, patient way of arranging flowers. What resonates with me the most about ikebana is that negative space – emptiness - is part of these floral arrangements, and the emptiness does not need to be filled in. Less is more. Space is created in which God can act. When we fill our

days with too many things, we might not leave room for what brings us life or for noticing God.

As I researched a weaver for our next Arts and Faith weekend, one artist's project spoke to me. She is weaving 50 stoles for 50 women in ministry as part of a larger art installation, and I really wanted to participate. She invited me to send her three items of fabric. The fabric would not be returned but would be transformed into the weaving of the stole. What fabric would I choose? I recently uncovered three family baptismal gowns, so I sent her one. An old cream-colored family apron was the next item offered; torn and stained from years of use. I loved that apron. It held memories of learning to bake bread and beginning our communion bread ministry. An unfinished tapestry our mother had been working on 36 years ago was her final project before she died. It is now framed with her needle in the spot where she had placed it in the canvas, and the colorful leftover thread became the third item sent to the artist. I included a fourth item from my father. Music filled him with joy, so I sent the artist his beloved score of Mendelssohn's *Elijah*, which looked like a journal with notes written all over the pages. When I received the completed stole a few months ago, I was overwhelmed. Here are the two small buttons from the baptismal gown, here is the metal grommet from the apron. The tapestry thread and music are woven throughout, including my father's name, which he'd written on the music, placed here, right over my heart. I spent time praying with this stole, carefully looking at the music meticulously curated, and wrote down all the words I could read from his old score of *Elijah*. A phrase repeated throughout the stole kept speaking to me, "hear and answer, hear and answer." Although this phrase is Elijah's prayer pleading with God, "Hear me and answer me," it spoke to me in a different way. I

heard, “listen and respond, listen and respond.” How can we know how to respond without first listening?

We may also come to know the many dimensions of God more fully by listening with the ear of our heart, as St. Benedict said. In the writings of the prophets, the ear is valued above all other senses. The opening scripture in Deuteronomy, known as the Shema or Great Commandment, expresses a central declaration of faith – a command to hear and to love wholeheartedly, with steadfast commitment. We are then instructed to seal these words upon our heart and mind, make them part of our very being, and to carry them with us like a companion. A companion walking alongside us, laughing and grieving with us, sharing stories and being fully present, is a gift that can fill our hearts.

Just before taking a semester abroad, our son Andrew asked what I would like for Mother’s Day. I asked if he would be my companion and walk the labyrinth at Mercy Center together. A labyrinth is a form of walking meditation which helps us open to God and offers the possibility for receiving spiritual insight and wisdom. A prayer Andrew held upon entering the labyrinth was whether to cut his beard and long hair before his travels to an unknown place. After our walk around the twists and turns, we sat on a bench and reflected. Andrew said, “I heard the answer right away – I should definitely keep the hair. He said, “I walked quickly at first, then sat in the center. As I returned around the path, my pace slowed down. I looked behind me, in front of me, and then looked at my feet. That is where I focused for the rest of the journey.” Andrew then knew that he didn’t have to worry – all would be well if he just lived in the moment. Mindfulness.

Jesus lived mindfully and he lived heartfully, pausing, resting, and allowing his prayerful thoughts to move to the depths of his heart. Over the years, hearts have been romanticized, but they used to be thought of as organs of perception and knowing. How might we move from our mind to our heart – to a place of deeper awareness? First, we must want to face this journey and be willing to change. A few years ago, our whole family hiked Mount Washington in New Hampshire. This is a longer story for another time, but we started on an unfamiliar path and hiked for 18 hours, getting back to the car at midnight. This was my prayer of longing in the dark of night: *Dear God, my weary body aches so much! Give me the strength to endure each step of this long path. I keep stumbling over the rocks, rocks, and more rocks. When will they stop? I long for the spaces between the rocks, the expanses of earth where I might not stumble, the silent crevices where I may hear your voice!*

Haven't you been in a place like this too? A time in your life when you shout out to God, where are you? Hear me! Answer me! If we intentionally open ourselves to God and take time to notice God's presence, even when we are in a fearful or noisy place, we can begin to feel peaceful and calm. From this empty, vulnerable, and spacious place, God can lead us to where we are called, our authentic self, our true home where God abides and where we may catch a glimpse of heaven...the fullness of God. Heartfulness.

God speaks to each of us in different ways. Only by creating space and listening deeply, with patience and trust, may we begin to sense the whispers of God's reply. A friend of mine told me that she cannot sit in silence, but she hears God's voice through the noise and clutter in her life. She finds the space

and inclines her ear toward God. Another friend has constant ringing in her ears, so for her, complete silence is unbearable. She has found her space, a way to listen with the ear of her heart and to see with the eyes of her heart.

Listening with our whole being requires a full range of hearing...breadth and length and height and depth hearing. Engaging all our senses with this fine-tuned listening allows different voices to speak within our body. We may listen for echoes of God by carrying words, visual art, music, smells, tastes, all sensations within us throughout the day. Reflecting on them helps us to know how to respond in life-giving ways. When we allow ourselves to enter the heart of God, our listening becomes deeper still. Then we may hear God's prayer for ourselves and for the world. The prophets watched intently, listened deeply, and responded faithfully. They were obedient to God's command to listen and love. The word "obedience" comes from a Latin word meaning "to give ear, to harken, to listen." To obey means to hear and then act on what we've heard. What if Elijah hadn't leaned his ear toward God? Many times, the voice of God comes from unexpected places, like a burning bush. What if we don't notice?

When our loved ones die, there can be an emptiness that is felt in our lives. The week before my father died, I sat with him and we listened to his favorite music together. We shared reflections from Ladue Chapel's prayer walk. When I asked Dad, "What do you see?" he didn't look around the room, but closed his eyes and responded in a way I couldn't understand; the language of heaven. Our time together was sacred. Dad is closer to me than ever before because I feel his presence in my heart. To me, this is a miracle. Miracles happen every day, but we don't always notice. What miracles might happen

when we listen to others with an inclining attentiveness as deep and wide as God? These sacred encounters, these times of communion, can fill our hearts. Heartfulness.

In a few moments, you and I will move into a time of silence. Whenever our mind wanders in prayer, it is an opportunity to practice turning toward God again and again. Prayerful listening is a spiritual discipline, like practicing sports or music. Teresa of Avila writes, “The important thing is not to think too much, and so to do whatever best awakens us to love.” This open stance in prayer allows God to speak to us through our heart. God knows the prayers within each of our hearts. These prayers are not just for us...our prayers reach out to the whole world.

We will first sing the Taizé hymn found in your bulletin, repeating it several times before entering into one minute of silence. Repetition invites us into a rhythm which can help us move our prayer from our mind to our heart. You may wish to prepare by taking some deep breaths. This is your time to listen for echoes of God’s voice. We cannot expect total silence. When sounds occur, and they will, just acknowledge them and return to your focus on God. Practicing this way, over and over, is a discipline that helps us set aside unimportant things in life and move God to the center. After our silent prayer together, the music will gently bring us back.

Taizé music: Come and fill our hearts with your peace, you alone, O Lord, are holy...SILENCE...flute plays music to gently bring us back...

Dante said, “Beauty awakens the soul to act.” What word, song, or image spoke to you today? You may wish to hold this memory in your heart as your prayer for the week. How might expressions of beauty heard through music and scripture, or seen through God’s creation, inspire you to act? Follow your heart to the place where God is leading you. Through intentional discernment in silence and deep listening, through the Holy Spirit, we may come to know our authentic self and gain wisdom about God’s will for our life. Then with God’s help, we can do infinitely more than we could ever imagine. Hear, O Israel. Listen with the heart of Christ. Listen for the voice of God. Listen...listen...keep listening until your heart is full and love overflows again and again and again.