

Luke 18: 35-42

When Jesus was coming close to Jericho, a blind man sat begging beside the road. The man heard the crowd walking by and asked what was happening. Some people told him that Jesus from Nazareth was passing by.

So the blind man shouted, “Jesus, Son of David,<sup>[g]</sup> have pity on me!” The people who were going along with Jesus told the man to be quiet. But he shouted even louder, “Son of David, have pity on me!”

Jesus stopped and told some people to bring the blind man over to him. When the blind man was getting near, Jesus asked, “What do you want me to do for you?”  
“Lord, I want to see!” he answered.

Jesus replied, “Look and you will see! Your eyes are healed because of your faith.”  
*\*This is the Word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God!*

We are in the middle of our BLESS preaching series.

But it doesn't matter if you haven't heard the other sermons,  
because each can offer hope and tools to live a Spirit-filled life.  
Although I def encourage you to ck them out on FB or website!

To Bless someone is one of the greatest gifts we can give to another.  
I think about it this way:

In the parched deserts of our life—with all the struggles we face, times of  
incredible isolation, suffering, pain, uncertainty, anger, divisiveness,  
political rhetoric and fear—amidst all the places, people and situations  
that create these arid, parched deserts in our life—  
a **blessing** can be like the discovery of a fresh well...  
that living water we've read and heard about in John's Gospel.

Pastor Jess & I launched this series hoping that we rediscover  
our power to bless one another.

I believe each of us can bless—its not just a pastor thing.

When a blessing is invoked, it changes the atmosphere.

Because the abundance of God's love & grace that is within each of us  
can flow outward into other people and situations.

Last week Pastor Jess challenged us, teaching to bless someone Begins with Prayer  
And that to do so sets us off on a Spirit-filled adventure!

I seriously upped my prayer time this past week and because of that,  
have felt more grounded in my daily walk with the Lord.

In addition to my daily devotion for all on the prayer list and those I'm visiting  
and connecting with as part of my pastoral care,  
I've been praying daily for 2 missionaries from our Faith Promise cards.

It has been such a blessing to learn more about them; I am going to take 2 more  
prayer cards for focused prayers of blessing for the upcoming week.

I encourage you to select another 1 or 2 today—the small basket is in the center isle;  
or you can ask for a card to be sent to you from the office if you're online.

To BLESS others Begins with Prayer. Amen? BUT THERE IS MORE!

This morning, I'm adding another Blessing tool.

I think it rather an under-rated skill set for folk to claim and use—  
a priceless gift we have at our disposal in Blessing others  
that reveals God's love and care...

Whether someone is sitting down the pew from you,  
or at home next to you on the couch,  
or in the neighborhood where you live and play,  
your classmate a few seats back or  
a complete stranger at McDonalds or the Cubby Hole on Main Street.

We BLESS others when we LISTEN.

My siblings in Christ—  
a relationship starts with listening to someone's words and life story.

To really hear and understand what someone you've been praying for  
is actually saying and feeling may be the kindest, most loving gift  
you or I can give.

Listening moves us forward in our relationships, as God uses us to bless others.  
It's always the next step—indeed an ongoing step, by step, by step—  
in loving your family, your friends and your neighbors  
helping them know and experience the love of God.

But to really listen...is a hard skill set to acquire and put into loving practice.

Now Let's keep it real...we live in a world where hardly anybody  
really listens to each other.

You don't have to look much further than social media to see that most people are more interested in what THEY have to say than what someone else has to say.

I've heard it said that "The opposite of listening is NOT speaking...  
Its waiting to speak"

Isn't that true? That even when we're not talking,  
we can simply be eagerly-even impatiently-waiting for our turn to talk?  
Come on...so we're not actually listening to the words someone is saying?

I don't like admitting this, but too many times,  
I'll be in the middle of a conversation,  
and all of a sudden I realize I'm not really listening anymore.

I'm just cuing up what I'm going to say next...because  
I want to share MY thoughts, my ideas, my wisdom and expertise.  
Maybe you can relate to doing this too?

When we do this, we're not listening to understand... Right?  
We already decided we "know" their point or opinion...and  
immediately focus our mental energy into formulating our response.

Another struggle with listening? When a friend, coworker, or maybe a neighbor comes to you or me needing to talk about something...  
And rather than listening to understand, we jump into "fix it" mode  
by giving them 2 or 3 options to make it right, to make it all better-  
according to OUR opinion.

The truth is that most people don't want our expertise; they want our support.  
They just want to be heard, known and to know you and I actually care.  
And sadly, we probably all totally understand what its like to be on that other end—  
The one who's not listened to, the one who feels unheard, or talked over.

How many times have you been in a conversation with a person who was there  
But not really there? Lots of "uh-huhs" on the other end?  
Like Pastor Jess said in the Young Disciples Time?

This has happened to me—especially in crowded events—  
I'm talking with someone, and I can see the shift occur—eyes glaze over,  
those "uh-huhs" start coming out at weird times and then  
their eyes start scanning the room around you, looking for someone...  
anyone else but you...

Oh MAN that's painful when it happens because  
when I know someone's not listening,  
I feel so...devalued...like a nobody.

Friends, when we don't listen, people not only feel unheard,  
But may begin to feel unknown.

Priest and author Henri Nouwen wrote:

"Listening is much more than allowing another to talk  
while waiting for a chance to respond....

The beauty of listening is that, those who are listened to start feeling accepted,  
they start taking their own words more seriously  
and discovering their own true selves.

Listening is a form of spiritual hospitality...  
by which you invite strangers to become friends."

When we want to love our neighbors & bless all the people  
God has put in our life path,  
we have to become intentional about listening & listening to understand.

And here is where Jesus shows us the way.  
Jesus was the ultimate listener.  
He modeled this second BLESS practice for us in amazing ways.

Jesus was motivated by love for every person he encountered.

Not only did he pray unceasingly, perform miracles and teach mind-blowing truths,  
But Jesus took the time, again & again, to show his love in the most practical  
and simple way—He listened.

His encounter with the blind beggar Jess read earlier is a great example.

Jesus along a road crowded with all kinds of folks traveling,  
hears a man shouting out to him from a distance.

*"Jesus, Son of David,<sup>[2]</sup> have pity on me!" The people who were going along with Jesus told the man to be quiet. But he shouted even louder, "Son of David, have pity on me!" Jesus stopped and told some people to bring the blind man over to him."*

Now I want us to pause here for just a moment, because I don't want us to miss this.

Jesus wasn't necessarily looking for someone to heal that day.  
He was on his way to Jericho, one of the last stops on the way to Jerusalem

to participate in the Passover Feast.

Jericho was extra busy as you can imagine that time of year.

Picture NY's Times Square on New Year's Eve. Hordes of people.

And in the midst of them was a blind man crying out: "Have mercy upon me!"

In all that commotion, Jesus heard that singular voice.

It makes me think back to when our twin daughters were infants—

Rich and I could hear even the faintest of cries of one of our girls at night.

I think Jesus heard the blind man the same way.

The people traveling with him told the man to leave Jesus alone.

But he wouldn't. Instead he cried out even louder.

And remember what happens next:

*"When the blind man was getting near, Jesus asked,*

*"What do you want me to do for you?"*

*And he answered, "Lord, I want to see!"*

*Jesus replied, "Look and you will see! Your eyes are healed because of your faith."*

Now you knew that was coming right?

Blind man can't see, He calls out to Jesus, and Jesus heals him. The end.

But let's slow down...what I want us to notice is the question Jesus asks:

"What do you want me to do for you?"

Now maybe it seems like a silly question.

I'm sure Jesus knew the man was blind, so why does he ask him that?

Is this some sort of dramatic buildup for the miracle to follow? I don't think so.

I believe something is happening here that we could easily miss in a quick read.

The question Jesus asks tells us something profound about His character.

It shows that Jesus, even Jesus, didn't assume he knew what people needed—

and he didn't want you or me to assume WE know what people need either.

So he asked questions...lots of questions...and he listened.

So we want to bless our neighbors, friends and family?

Imitate Jesus in the way you listen to them.

It's a challenge not just to hear the words they say, but to really listen.

Put down the smart phone, turn off Netflix,

don't let your eyes scan the room for someone else, don't try to fix ...

Let us Slow down the busyness, and our own egos, and give them our full attention.  
Because that's how you and I really get to know the people  
whom God places in our lives.

When we take the time to listen and get to know someone,  
That's when the people around us truly feel loved and blessed.

When we look at the totality of Jesus' life and ministry,  
I admit as an "A type" Achiever I am naturally drawn to the stories of Jesus  
doing over-the-top, amazing feats;  
I remember the exceptional, extraordinary moments—like Feeding thousands,  
healing so many sick, even raising the dead.

But as we explore and dig deep into how Jesus modeled these BLESS practices,  
His more frequent and ordinary interactions really jump out.

The moments when he paused, stopped, pulled up a chair,  
looked someone in the eye and simple LISTENED...  
along the road, in the garden, around a meal, on the beach,  
in temple, at a well, on a mountain...

I think that living a life of blessing others—like Jesus did—  
Is NOT a journey of the spectacular.

In fact, its usually best lived out in the regular...  
In the everyday...in these seemingly mundane moments of life,  
We can get within arms reach of another person and actually listen  
to what's going on in their hearts and thoughts.

THAT'S when we may have our greatest opportunity to love and bless someone.

I love pastor Jess' young disciples message. Dr. Laennec who invented the stethoscope warned  
his colleagues in 1816:

"If you use this tool, don't stop listening to your patients—  
they will still tell you how to heal them."

He wanted to make sure doctors didn't just listen to the heart and lungs,  
he wanted them to listen to the words and feelings of their patients.  
It is a huge blessing-gift to listen to the hearts of others.

Everyone has a story...but not everyone has someone who will listen to that story.

Listen to people.

Listen to our community.

Listen to coworkers and classmates.

Listen to our neighbors.

Listen to those who live at the margins.

Listen to the hurts, the needs, the pain of people God has placed in your life.

Listen to the joy, dreams and hopes too.

Listen to their stories and discover what they really need.

When was the last time you or I asked the single mom who lives down the street,  
or the widowed man how she or he was doing?

Or stopped what we were doing to give our undivided attention  
to the person right next to you?

Or slowed down long enough to listen to the cashier  
who casually mentioned that her husband was hospitalized?

All missed opportunities to Bless others in deeply profound ways.

Friends we're called to just show up and listen for what God wants us to hear.

Jesus heard one man's voice in a huge crowd and asked,  
"What do you want me to do?"

Each and every day we come into contact with people—

In person, via ZOOM or Facetime, on the street, waiting on line or in class—  
People nobody seems to care about or who might even intimidate you.

My prayer is that as we take Jesus' words and actions to heart,

And begin to really listen to the people around us

We will see how God wants to use each and everyone of us...

To BLESS the people you love,

To BLESS ALL the people whom God has placed in your life path

AND change lives.

People we can do this...Blessed to be a Blessing

Just by LISTENING.

May it be so. Amen and amen.