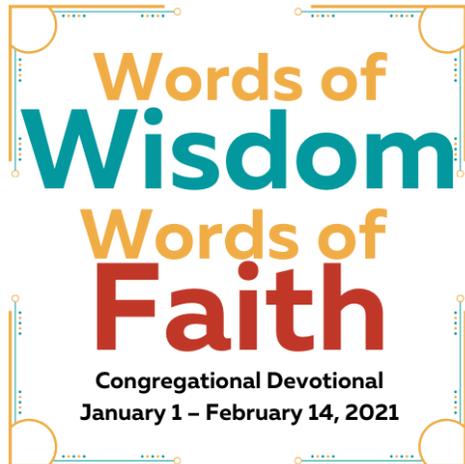


Words of Wisdom, Words of Faith: LISTEN

MARK 9:2-9

CHARLIE BERTHOUD | SERMON FOR SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 14, 2021



Words of wisdom. Words of faith.

Since January 1, we've been reflecting on single words to help us grow as Christians.

We are people of the Word.

The Bible begins with God speaking words—using words to call forth the sky and the sea, the sun and the moon, the animals and birds and fish, and humanity.

Jesus came as the word made flesh to dwell among us full of grace and truth.

God's word is with us.

God's word is all around us.

We have God's word in the Bible.

We live in a culture with easy access to the Bible, with all sorts of print versions and plenty of online options.

Not only are we surrounded by God's word, but we're surrounded by words and information in general.

Thanks to the marvel of technology, thanks to these little devices that most of us have, within seconds we could be reading about quantum physics, the Roman Empire, or Aaron Rogers statistics.

And we could watch (for a price) pretty much any movie or show we'd like, or we could watch videos of just about anything: home repair tutorials, musical instrument lessons, and puppy videos.

Our options for watching, reading, and listening are overwhelming. It's like going to an ice cream shoppe with 200 flavors and being paralyzed by indecision. Black raspberry, butter pecan, chocolate chip cookie dough.

Think what it would be like if you were driving across the desert and you stop at a little gas station, where they have nothing in the cooler but plain old ice cream sandwiches. You would be grateful. Or you rent a cabin in the woods, and the old tv doesn't get a signal, but there is a DVD of a classic movie. You'd enjoy it.

When we are apart from the overwhelming choices, we're grateful for what we have, and we have new appreciation for what is right in front of us.

When we clear our minds of all the noise, we can hear new things. Do you ever get great ideas standing in the shower or lying in bed?

That's kind of what I see happening in our scripture reading today, on this Transfiguration Sunday, the Sunday before Lent, before the journey to Jerusalem begins.

Jesus takes three disciples up on a mountain, away from the noise, away from the distractions. Maybe Jesus is hoping that the fresh mountain air will help the disciples see things more clearly. Throughout Mark's gospel especially, the disciples seem to be misunderstanding Jesus a lot, so Jesus takes these three to a quiet and beautiful place, with the hope that they would see and hear things more clearly.

On the mountain top, the voice of God speaks, encouraging the disciples to pay attention.

Hear now the account of the Transfiguration, from Mark chapter 9.

²Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, ³and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. ⁴And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. ⁵Then Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” ⁶He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. ⁷Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!”

Thanks be to God for the words of Scripture.

We live in a noisy world.

It’s really hard to LISTEN to what is important.

As we move into the holy season of Lent, I invite you to make it a **season of listening.**

Listening to the people around you, your loved ones.

Listening to the world around us, especially to people who are hurting—poor people, oppressed people, lonely people.

Listening to ourselves—to our bodies, to our hearts, to our hurts, to our longings. Parker Palmer writes about listening to your life.

At the essence, this is listening to God. The one who created us, the one who loves us, the one who calls us to live with meaning and purpose.

In order to really listen to what is important, we have to block out the noise.

And we get a lot of noise from technology—from our phones, our tablets, our desktops, and our TVs.

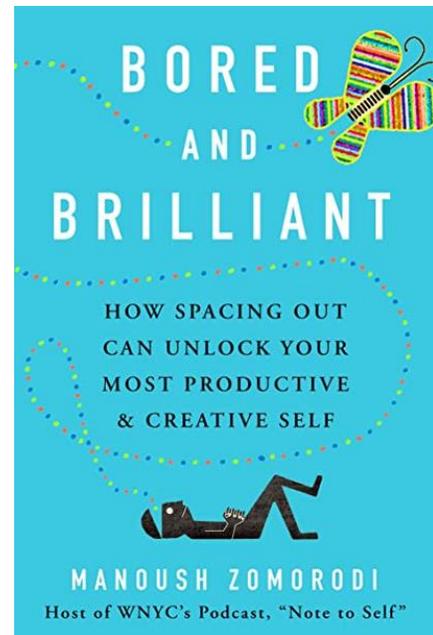
In our time of Covid, we are increasingly dependent on technology. We are so thankful for email, social media, zoom gatherings, texting and more—all these great ways to stay connected when we can't be physically together.

But our human nature leads us astray and we are too easily sucked into our screens for too long.

I've heard this concern from a lot of people.

So, it led back to a book I dabbled with a couple years ago. It's called *Bored and Brilliant*

How Spacing Out Can Unlock Your Most Productive and Creative Self, by Manoush Zomorodi.



She's a journalist who has heard from thousands of people who feel like they may be addicted to their cell phones, and that addiction is impeding productivity and affecting mental health (p. 7).

The book lays out a fascinating process to encourage new ways of relating to our technology, to give our minds (and I would add our souls) some space to rest and thrive. She's not anti-technology, but she is for healthy use of technology.

For instance, she doesn't denounce all video game playing; she actually says it's good in small doses to relieve stress. She encourages people to set a timer and play for a short period of time. She cites a doctor who advocates small and appropriate doses of video games—in the same way that we take two aspirin and not two hundred (p. 99).

The book, like many others these days, encourages us to be more mindful and intentional about our screen usage in order to be healthier, happier, and wiser.

Now I'm fully aware of the irony of talking about the danger of using

screens too much while you are watching this worship service on a screen. I get that.

In this crazy Covid time we need our screens more than ever. But that means we need boundaries, guidelines, and self-control more than ever. So as we enter into the season of Lent, a time when people often give up something to make room in their lives for God, I want to offer some suggestions for you to consider.

BUZZ FREE: turn off some or all of your notifications. Most of so-called “breaking news” isn’t that important, and we don’t really need a buzz, a ding, or a little red circle every time we get an email or a social media notification.

SCREEN FREE TIME: Intentionally go screenless for an hour or two or 24. No phone, no tablet, no TV. For some people an hour of screen free life would be a major accomplishment. Try it.

MORNINGS and EVENING FREE: Get in the habit of turning off screens an hour or so before bedtime and you’ll probably sleep better. Don’t jump for your screen first thing in morning. Take a deep breath. Go for a walk (unless it’s -20 windchill outside). Spend a few minutes in prayer. Then go to your screens and you’ll probably have a clearer sense of priorities for the day.

SCREEN FREE ZONE: Designate certain areas of the house as no screens allowed. Maybe the dinner table. Maybe the bedroom. Maybe the bathroom.

PHONE FREE EXCURSION: Go for a walk or go to the store without your phone. You’ll be OK.

Maybe you noticed—each suggestion has the word FREE in it. Being more mindful about our technology gives us some new freedom to think, to be creative, and for us Christians to listen for the voice of God, to listen for what’s really important in life.

Please note these invitations are not intended for you to shove in front of someone else. Maybe there is room for discussion in your family, but I encourage you to start with YOU.

Charity begins at home, and so does transformation.

The word of the day is LISTEN. The gospel reading has God telling his three disciples, “This is my son. Listen to him.” As disciples, as followers, we are called to listen to the words of Jesus.

And even though it’s Valentine’s Day today, we need to remember that Jesus’ teachings both comfort us and challenge us. In the spirit of loving the world and encouraging us to truly love one another, Jesus says things like:

LOVE NEIGHBORS...AND ENEMIES
DENY YOURSELF
TAKE UP YOUR CROSS
LOSE YOUR LIFE TO SAVE IT
FOLLOW ME



The good news of the gospel is that God loves us and that God continues to speak to us. Let’s try to listen.