

SERMON Luke 12:49-56 Do we get it yet?

Let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith – Hebrews 11

I went to seminary in 2004. Not long before that I was working on a consulting project in Hong Kong. In a break between trips there, I met another consultant friend in London for a drink, and we talked about how we felt we operated within the cultures, boundaries and values of the various corporate masters we served. We wondered how we might keep our core selves intact and healthy, not subsumed by our work values, our cultural and even our family values. I told him I was thinking about learning how to do Transcendental Meditation, to keep myself centered and uncluttered, and he told me he was thinking about doing the EST training. We agreed we each needed a push to commit to doing either of these things, and so we made a pact that we would both do both things to spur each other on.

How great that we did! The benefits of both have underpinned my life ever since. TM, because it enabled me to keep refreshing and refining my inner self.

And est was life changing! – one of the greatest learning points of EST is the fundamental realization that as humans we tend to be **already always listening**. I mentioned this last week when the gospel recalled God booming Listen to Him! from the skies to the apostles at the Transfiguration. And so the listening theme occurs again in this week's gospel reading, also from Luke. The fact is, we listen selectively.

The world imposes data and noise from every direction, and this forms our opinions, prejudices, beliefs and more. If we are to find who we are, and who we want to be, we need to filter unhelpful things out, live in the here and now, and avoid listening selectively. Humans tend to hear what they want to hear from all the data that comes in. For example, I like what that politician says about that, so I'll vote for him or her. But I won't hear the rest of what he or she might say. Or: I liked the nice bits in someone and they won me over - I didn't let the rest reach my consciousness. An example in history was that his great talent as an orator made Hitler attractive to the masses. We filter out the things we don't like, then they often come back to haunt us, and we become judgmental, and live in denial.

So, if we work at finding and nurturing what is truthful, we have what EST used to call transformation. *We* might want to call it: our Christian selves.

Werner Ehrhart, founder of EST, by the way, is an Episcopalian!

Reading Luke's gospel this morning I feel quite sure Jesus would have signed up his 12 apostles to do the EST training - as a matter of urgency! After 3 years, as his ministry nears its end they still haven't got what his mission is about. Hence today's outburst. Gentle Jesus, meek and mild, prince of peace? Not today He isn't. This Jesus says *forget peace, I'm here to announce division!* His rant sounds more like one his cousin John the Baptist would make. But they needed it. Remember by now Jesus, with his disciples, is on His way to Jerusalem. He had warned them this was to lead to his arrest and death, and they didn't want to know. *They* liked the crowd-pleasing miracles, and the parables. Jesus being a rock star.

But for Jesus time was running out. As much as He warned and explained to them about building His kingdom, they were still holding out for a Messiah who would be a military hero arriving in a chariot to bring down the Roman occupation, and restore the throne of David. Wasn't that promised centuries ago? Why not just hold onto those dreams? They filtered out the talk of a servant king, two commandments rather than 10: love God, love your neighbor -whoever that might be, rich/ poor, Jew/*Gentile*. A king who would be tortured and executed? - No thanks.

So while Jesus has come to proclaim God's radical will for the world through his mission to redeem a broken world, his followers are stuck in the listening of the past. As Jews they were God's Chosen people. The ones rescued from Egypt and witness to countless miracles on their journey to the Promised Land. They were given the Word of God and entrusted with sacred scriptures and covenants, that would forgive their sins and give them a spiritual legacy like no other. Yet after over 400 years, the Jews in Jesus' day were living in a Greek speaking world oppressed by the Romans, with political needs valued higher than the spiritual needs of the people. They were also heavily taxed, and violated spiritually, politically, culturally and personally.

They had lost their core selves, but even so they accepted their lot, were complacent and numb even to the teachings of hope and salvation Jesus had been preaching about the way the Kingdom of God works. They still didn't get it. Once in a while, there would be a glimmer of understanding, but it would quickly fade, as the disciples who knew Jesus best kept trying to put him into the box of their own expectations. Today we hear his exasperation, and he lets rip – first at the twelve, and then at the crowds who were ever present.

So now Jesus talks of the need for fire – not to burn or destroy- but to refine and purify. To shake them out of their *already always listening* to the same old, same old. He adds he can't wait to bring down fire himself. This was going to shake them out of their old listening if anything could.

He knows what lies ahead for him, and for them, they need to be ready, dragged out of their old and stale thinking.

What of us, in our time, centuries since first century Palestine?

Remember bumper stickers that said : **Jesus is coming: are you ready?** Well, are you, are we?

It's telling us too don't be complacent, old thinking and being won't do. Instead we need to refine ourselves for what living the life we feel we are called to *really means*. Not a filtered, 'going through the motions' version of it we hope will tick the right boxes. Are we ***already always doing that?***

Like the apostles, we can easily get carried along unless we filter the complacent stuff out. And in the way of our world, things can change in the blink of an eye, so we need to be fully attuned to the moments we live in - and live in them right.

As an old lady in my congregation in Alabama used to say "It don't mean nothin' if your heart aint right"

It's easier (says Jesus) to see what kind of weather is coming than to understand the spiritual climate we are asked to live in. In our world now of course it's hard, but we are still needing to be the best we can be, each in ourselves, building the kingdom of God as we go, wherever we

see it's needed. On the streets, where there is hopelessness, where can reach out and do our part. We risk Jesus writing us off as people who feign piety, (Jesus called them hypocrites), if we don't.

Jesus tells us also that time is of the essence. And maybe too the need for a refining fire under us, to spark us to listen to where he tells you and me to put ourselves in His service.

This so called *hard saying* of Jesus in today's gospel was His big push to get his followers finally to shape up.

And it's calling *us* to live by what we profess, to walk the talk. Not pick and choose, just do the things we enjoy, listen and act selectively. We are asked to love the unlovable, serve others, whoever they maybe. Put ourselves out, not be armchair Christians.. Deitrich Bonhoeffer said, "*there is a cost to this discipleship.*" And yes there is. But it has far greater rewards than just embracing the lesser values of our world.

And by the way, my high flying consultant friend became an evangelical preacher in his happy clappy church, and writes books on motivation, and as for me, well, here I am these days with you.

AMEN