

## Getting Ready reflection: March 2009

### **Listening, Vocation, and Compassionate Justice** **“Listen, God is calling!”**

Our faith is a listening faith. We listen for God’s word, God’s call, and God’s promises each and every day of our lives. The word that comes forth from the lips of God creates and gives life. God speaks and it happens ([Genesis 1:1-31](#)). We are wise to listen to this word. Moses slipped off his shoes as he stood on holy ground and listened to the voice of God in the burning bush ([Exodus 3:1-22](#)). Ruth listened to God’s call to remain devoted to the well-being of her mother-in-law, Naomi, even though local custom did not expect such loyalty ([Ruth 1:6-22](#)). Eli taught the young boy Samuel how to listen even though it meant Samuel would deliver harsh news from God to Eli ([1 Samuel 3:1-21](#)). Elijah listens to the voice of God as it emerges from utter silence ([1 Kings 19:1-18](#)). A young teenager named Mary listens to the angel Gabriel explain how she will become overshadowed (Something most of us do not appreciate!) by God and the same word that came forth from God’s lips at creation will become flesh within her ([Luke 1:26-38](#)). Jesus Christ, this fleshy word, listens to a Gentile woman begging him to heal her daughter ([Mark 7:24-30](#)). He listens to a distraught father, who is perceived as not being faithful, plead for Jesus to heal his son ([Mark 9:14-29](#)). And he calls forth, listens to and blesses the children who are often expected to be seen and not heard—not worth listening to ([Mark 10:13-16](#)).

Our faith is a listening faith and our God is a listening God.

Our faith calls us to a life of listening to Christ’s daily call and to our neighbor’s daily needs. We hear this call as Jesus responds to the scribes’ question about the greatest commandment. “The first is, ‘Hear O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” ([Mark 12:28-34](#)). The love that extends from us to God is what we call faith. The love that extends from us to our neighbor is what we call works. Both are integral components of listening faith. [Ephesians 2:8-10](#) assures us of this. We are not saved by our works but by God’s grace received through faith: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast.” Verse 10 continues this truth by assuring us that works still have a place. “For we are what [God] has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.” Serving our neighbor is our way of life. It is not something we do to serve God, nor is it something we do to prove our faith. It is something we do because we were created for it.

So then, what does this life of service for which we were created look like? Moses, Ruth, Samuel, Elijah, and Mary did not know what they were getting into when they stopped to listen to God’s call. They listened and responded. We also find Jesus listening and responding to people’s needs in ways that moved beyond the code of ethics of his day. Martin Luther teaches us that people were at the center of Jesus’ understanding of service. His decisions were not based on a particular understanding of God’s law or God’s will, but on a person’s actual needs.<sup>1</sup> These acts of compassionate justice for which we were created will look like the good works our neighbor actually needs.

There is no list which is used to determine whether our not what we do is important or helpful. We do that which our neighbor needs us to do. We will not be serving the people of New Orleans if we enter New Orleans with our own idea of what we would like to do to help them. We would be serving ourselves. Instead, we will enter New Orleans with ears to hear. We will listen to our hosts, the people who live in this city. We will hear them express their joys and sufferings. We will hear them tell us their stories. We will cry together, laugh together, and I

imagine we will also grow angry together. We are saved by grace through our faith. This grace makes our hearts ache when we witness injustices in our world. This grace also sets us free to serve our neighbor, not for our sake, not for God's sake, but for our neighbor's sake. God's grace sets us free to serve those in New Orleans and those in our own homes. This is compassionate justice. We call this our vocation, or calling. This lesson will help your group explore and understand their vocation as faithful listeners and compassionate doers of justice.

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<sup>1</sup>Gustaf Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, trans. Carl C. Rasmussen (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1957), 46.