

Do You Hear It?

a sermon

by Dan Griswold

Trinity Reformed Church

January 8, 2017

Matthew 3:13–17

I didn't see you all last week. So, I'll have to say it now: Happy New Year!

I would guess that many of you have entered the new year much as I have: out of breath from last year, and seriously wondering what this year would hold. And, much like me, you may have been reflecting on the past and contemplating the future with hope and with plans.

For me, these aren't so much "resolutions," as they are typically known and made.

Instead, for me, they have been more like desires. Intentions. A recognition of what I want and don't want for this year.

So, in this new year, for the months ahead, I *want* ... both more and less.

Maybe you do, too.

More exercise. Less snacking.

More laughing. Less complaining.

More reading. Less TV.

More depth. Less fluff.

I can't say that the year is off to the best start. It's been a little cold for walking or biking. There are still plenty of holiday treats and candies around the house. I do like TV.

But I'm trying, this "more" and this "less."

Maybe you are, too.

Yet the more and less is not just about activities and habits. It's just as much about attitude.

I want to live life with *more awareness*, of my own blessings and opportunities, as well as the blessings, opportunities, and needs of others. I want to be *more grateful* and to show *more gratitude*.

And I want *less* taking things for granted, *less* obsessing over what I don't have.

Because, really, there are many things that I do take for granted.

Maybe you do, too.

Family and friends.

Simple pleasures and mundane abilities.

Ordinary sensations and common senses: touch, sight, sound.

It's so easy to forget how amazing sound is, that is, until your hearing becomes noticeably weaker. It's easy to forget, because, for most of us, sound is always around us. So we may forget how amazing it is that tiny vibrations can move from here to there and in so doing *communicate*.

Yes, we're surrounded by sound, which means that sometimes we're lulled into forgetting that it's there. Which is a good thing in some ways, to forget that it's there. Or else we'd be completely overwhelmed by all the stimulating impulses of the huge quantity and variety of sounds that enter our ears. It's a good thing we can tune much of it out, easily, selectively.

Why do you think some people can study in coffee-houses, and even prefer to do so?

But sometimes we have tuned out so well that we can't tune in. The important sounds don't penetrate through all the noise.

They say this is a problem especially with husbands. I have no idea what they mean.

Really, the issue for many of us is that for us to hear something, really hear it, we have to notice it. We have to pay attention to it. We can hear it, really hear it,

only when we have listened to it,
when we seek to understand it,
when we welcome it into our world,
when we enter into its orbit.

Do you hear it?



One day, long ago, a man named John was at the Jordan River.

He wasn't alone.

There were lots of people there with John that day, having come out to the Jordan from near and far, a great crowd, drawn there by John's fiery words telling all to repent in preparation for the coming kingdom of God.

They came there because they had heard of his message. They came there because they wanted to hear it: directly, unfiltered and raw.

Rich and poor, strong and weak, young and old — they heard it. There were soldiers there, and tax collectors. They heard it, too.

They had all come there, not for a quiet gathering, serene, calm, and peaceful. It was crowded, with John the Baptist half naked and bellowing "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?!"

Now they thought, this crowd, that maybe *John* was the one they had been waiting for, that his words they heard were his saying that he was the man of promise. And you could feel the excitement, and hear the whispered chatter: "Could he be the one?" "Is he the Messiah?"

But he wasn't the one, and he told them as much. "The promised one would be much greater," he said. "Good grief!" he said, "I'm not worthy to touch the laces on his sneakers. I baptize with water, and with water alone. He will baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire, bringing judgment and blessing and grace."

And then, *he* arrived. Jesus. Jesus was there, in the midst of that crowd, presenting himself to be baptized. He goes down into the river, surrounded by the crowd. He receives the baptism, along with everyone else. And then, the heavens open, the Holy Spirit comes down, and a sound, a voice from heaven, speaks.

"This is my son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

Yes, God was speaking: to Jesus. But also to those gathered there, those who would hear, those who would listen.

"This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well-pleased."

Speaking, to make clear. Speaking, to make whole. Speaking, to make beautiful and to mark truth.

"This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well-pleased."

Did they hear it? Did they really hear it?

The passage does not say who heard it.

Some, I'm sure, did not. To them, the words were but noise. The words landed at the ear, but went no further. Overlooked, unheard, misheard, leading neither to understanding nor appreciation, the voice of God did not finally come to them that day. So as they looked at Jesus, they saw him as nothing special, as just another man being baptized by John.

Some, I'm sure, did hear the voice, really hear it. Maybe not completely, not fully understanding what it all meant. Maybe there were only a few who heard. But surely enough to take notice of this Jesus and to see him in a new light.

"This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well-pleased."



But really, God wasn't speaking only to those gathered there on that day. God was, and is, speaking to *us*. And God continues speaking, saying to us again and again as long as we might still listen:

"This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well-pleased."

Do you hear it?

Do you hear God's voice in unity with the humble, kneeling, still-wet figure of Jesus? Do you hear the identification of God with Jesus? Do you hear the divine command for us to see in Jesus

the will of God to deliver,
the intention of God to save,
the being of God to reveal?

Do you hear it?

We need to hear. But sometimes, we resist hearing the voice, God's voice. We resist the beauty. We resist the truth. We resist the invitation to follow. Do you hear it?

And we need to hear. And by "hearing," I don't mean the half-hearted, half-aware noticing of sound that we do hundreds of times a day. I mean really *listening*. I mean *understanding*. I mean welcoming it into our world, and entering into its orbit. To hear this sound, this voice, the voice of God declaring Jesus as the well-loved Son, is to listen with ears of faith. It is to follow, and in following, to obey. Do you hear it?

And when I say we *need* to hear, I'm not talking about an obligation. I'm not saying that we *ought* or *should* hear. Not really. Sure, there's some obligation, some "ought" or "should" involved. But that's not the main thing when I say that we need to hear. And, Lord knows, many of us have an awful lot of "ought" and "should" in our lives.

When I say that we *need* to hear, I'm talking about real *need*. I'm talking about thirst. I'm talking about hunger. I'm saying that our well-being and our being well depend on hearing the voice.

And the thing is, many of us have heard the voice. God has blessed us with the ability and the opportunity to hear the good news, to hear God's declaration that Jesus is his well-loved Son, to hear it and understand it and embrace it and celebrate it.

But then we forget. Or grow deaf. Having heard, and understood, and embarked on a path of discipleship, and striven to live as a Christ-follower, some of us find one day that the enthusiasm for Christ we once had and the joy that had been ours have waned a bit.

Even then, even to us, the forgetful and the spiritually hard of hearing, God is still speaking. And the word God speaks, my friends, is near to the ear, ready to be heard and embraced, the same word as before,

pointing to this man wet with humble waters of baptism;
pointing to this man who would
teach and heal,
bless and forgive,
suffer and die and rise;
inviting us to turn and trust that man, the Son of God, and him to follow
and obey.

“This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well-pleased.”

Do you hear it?

Will you hear it?

And having heard, then what?