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Proper 18 B

## TO LISTEN

Religion is defined as “belief and reverence for a supernatural power or powers regarded as creator and governor of the universe.” It is also about touching the lives of people. It is all about “doing” and not just “speaking or hearing or believing”. One of the most oft quoted lines of Holy Scripture is “*But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves.*” The claims of ‘true religion’ fill my office every day. Your life and my life is truly about one thing: will we pay attention to the needs of the people around us?

*“Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.”* Religion is not about what you understand. Religion is not about what you think you know. Religion is about ‘listening’ to your own life and to the world around you and responding to the needs of God’s children. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ created us and from the outset communicated with us that we might care for His creation and for His children. Need comes in all shapes and sizes. God is aware of the way we think and the way we jump so quickly to judge those in our world who are not like us. Last week’s Gospel mentioned several of the sins that come from within us. We

each have a favorite which we condemn readily. But if we are to live the life God gives us to live we must listen to Jesus on the subject of religion and life. I am not one who believes God is 'out there' somewhere and leaves it to us to carry on with His creation. He hears us daily and He initiates prayer within us for Him and for His creation. It is an intimacy beyond our understanding but importantly it is His way of creating and sustaining.

A man comes to Jesus with a speech impediment and a hearing disorder. Jesus heals the man. Jesus, unlike in other situations, did this privately, or hoped to, but it was not to be. Jesus is not parading his powers. He is teaching us about the religious life as God intends. He does not intend that all people know of His life is of that ability to heal and make well. It is His teaching and preaching which are more important to Him and His ministry among us. But Jesus does want all to know that His Heavenly Father can change a life in many ways. Healing is one of those ways.

Quite often as I do my devotions in the morning or am in conversation with you as we get to know each other I sense that God is at work to open our ears that it is His voice we hear and His words we speak. We are to take this private beginning and make it public at some time. For you see, Religion is not just about and for the individual but it is about and for God's created world.

But religion is more still. The story today teaches us about God's desire that we change directions in life. The deaf man's course in life seemed to be set. He was totally dependent on others perhaps even seeing his lot in life as that of begging.

But Jesus changed that life forever. Not only were this man's ears opened and his mouth opened to clarity but those around him were also changed forever for they could not stop speaking of this Jesus who could heal such malady. No dead end for this one. A new life was begun.

Do we truly 'listen' in life and pay attention to God's leading? Do we think we have all the wisdom on a subject or will we seek a greater vision, a Godly vision, at every turn in life? The story was told about the large truck that was moving through an underpass and got wedged in the tunnel. All the experts came to extricate the truck but to no avail.

A little boy kept trying to get the foreman's attention but was pushed away repeatedly. Finally, in absolute exasperation the foreman said, "I suppose you've come to tell us how to do this job?"

"Yes," said the youngster. "I suggest you let some air out of the tires."

Daily we walk through life oblivious to the lengths to which God will go to help us understand true purpose and true religion. We had much rather argue and rant and email our partial knowledge than to use the totality of what God has given

us, the ability to 'do' and not just 'hear.' One of the problems with our Church today is that we are close minded to how God is leading us. We are so sure of self that we will not hear God's leading through another, one who perhaps we think has nothing to offer. Isaiah says "*God will come and save you.*" He tells us today in our psalm that the 'wicked' will be 'frustrated.' Problem for most of us is that He doesn't say 'when!'

James is a book that was hard pressed to get into the Canon of Scripture. Luther called it a 'book of straw.' But it gets to the very heart of faith and life. It is a telling story of the same story Matthew told in chapter 25, the one about separating the sheep and the goats. You know the story don't you. The punch line is "*Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.*" And "*Truly, I say to you, as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me.*" We are to be DOERS! I refuse to go through this blessed life God has given me worrying about the sex habits of everyone I know. God is sorting that out as I speak. But more importantly I will 'serve the Lord' by standing around a flagpole with students every Monday and being in prayer with them; I will distribute food and bus tickets and gas money to those who can't afford to go where they need to go. I will visit in hospitals and homes and share God's love. That is religion. I trust God to change the lives of those who ask and for those who will not ask because they do not think it possible I refer them to our story today

from Mark chapter 7. Is your religion all about you and your ability to judge and find self-gratification or is it what God has given you, Redemption, a Son who gave it all for you and for me?

“Christ has no body now on earth but yours, no hands but yours, no feet but yours. Yours are the eyes through which Christ’s compassion looks out on the world. Yours are the feet with which he is to go about doing good. And yours are the hands with which he is to bless us now.” So said Teresa of Avila, one who struggled mightily to find true religion, to become a person of faith. And she is best known for the fact that she did not despair and give up but she realized the depths of her Redeemers love for her and she was a ‘doer’ for her Savior.

How much will you give for Christ? It is all His anyway. You have it on loan. He wants to see how generous you can be for Him. That is religion at its best, that you give all that you have to give for Him as He did for you. The world needs to see Him through you. Let’s keep the Main Thing the Main Thing. James was right. It is all about how you reflect Christ in life and how much you can give for Him. Amen.