**A Listening Heart | 1 Kings 3:5-15a**

Rev. Taylor Lewis Guthrie Hartman

*First Presbyterian Church, Statesboro, GA*

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*[Note: Attached to this sermon is our Prayer of the People for Sunday. We acknowledge the grave and troubling violence that occurred this past week and spent time lifting up the Tree of Life Community in prayer. We affirm that the word proclaimed and the word prayed are yoked and so it is with these two offerings, as well.]*

I’ve been trying a new spiritual discipline since moving here. I say try because I am certainly not *doing* it nor am I excelling at it. Many Friday mornings, I find myself at the Unitarian Universalist Association on the bypass, sitting on a round black cushion in silence while I breathe as slowly as I can. Those sweet saints over there open their MindBody Center to a donation-based meditation practice multiples times a week, a ministry of care for the community. When it works, or rather - when I get out of the way and let meditation do its thing - it is a gift that washes over me all day. My heart feels open and ready. But when it doesn’t - when I stand in the way - it is terribly frustrating.

Let’s take last Friday as an example. I came in at 8:59, the other meditation practitioners calm and engaged. My ankles crack quite frequently so I timidly walked across the floor to the pillow, sat down and then saw that I had sand all over the bottom of my foot which came from the inside of Hank’s shoe that he’d dumped in the hallway the night before. *Close your eyes, close your eyes, breathe, breathe.* I tried to measure my breath to mimic a slow wave of the ocean but then I thought about the ocean. Then I heard the roar of logging trucks and semis outside. And then I began to think about how we still needed a coffee table. *Concentrate, kid.* This lasted for thirty minutes with spurts of openness but really, it was a half-hearted attempt and it left me more anxious than when I arrived. Waiting for God can feel like that, can’t it?

Even when we go to quiet places - set apart places - settling in to prayer and presence before God can be filled with noise. I wonder if that’s what Solomon felt.

In our story from this morning, Solomon has gone to a place called Gibeon, a place set apart. It is thought that he went there for what some might call “an incubation period” - a purposeful retreat from the outside world to wait and listen for God. But he doesn’t go alone. Heavy-laden with all that has happened as of late, I wonder what raced through Solomon’s mind as he tried to settle in and listen for God. A quick scan back will remind us how the first three chapters of 1 Kings cover David passing on the throne to his son Solomon and the winding difficulty that got them to that point. Just a few verses before our pericope, we hear of how Solomon marries Pharaoh’s daughter despite Deuteronomy warning against close relations with Egypt and explicitly forbidding intermarriage. Then, one verse later, “He and his people are already in contravention of Deuteronomic law” because they are worshipping “at the high places, local places of worship that are frequently condemned as idolatrous.”[[1]](#footnote-0) I can’t sit still for thirty seconds without my mind drumming up something of the mundane - can you imagine what it must’ve been like for Solomon?

We don’t know how long Solomon retreated, how many nights he slept until the dream, or how silent he really was and yet, God was there. God is always there. I wonder if it was only by dream that God knew Solomon could be reached, that place somewhere nestled beyond consciousness. What Solomon does next, though, is so human that it makes me love him out of recognition. Even in his dream, Solomon can’t help but fill the space with words and with context. God appears and says, *Here I am! Ask me what I should give you!* And Solomon says, “Ok. Let me list out a few things you need to know first.”

It seemed Solomon needed to root his request in something he could hold on to, something he knew to be true even if all that surrounded him was chaos. And so - he reminds God of God’s steadfast love for David and doles out his own list of accolades for his recently departed father - faithful, righteous, uprightness of heart - and reminds God that in God’s love, David was given a son to sit on the throne. Then, Solomon is confessional, admitting that he doesn’t really know what he’s doing - he’s naive and immature, and certainly not knowledgeable in military leadership. And then, Solomon tells God what God knows but Solomon thinks it important to claim: he is in the midst of the people - the chosen people - so numerous they cannot be numbered.

Here is who I am: I have a history; I have a ways to go; I have community. God knows this, and yet, Solomon grounds his request in a sense of self-knowledge. He roots his faith first and then asks how he might grow. Taking stock of all that was, of all that he is and *isn’t*, and of who is around him, it is only *then* that Solomon can even begin to ask God for what he needs. While Solomon is not yet wise, he is quick and he knows that if he seeks to please God, he must do so by paying attention to it all. Nothing is separate for Solomon; all of his life informs his hope, informs his ask, informs his prayer.

And for his prayer? Our NRSV translation has Solomon asking for an understanding mind which is…part of it. In our Monday morning bible study, we usually have several translations of Scripture around the table and so like to lift up words that might be different, inviting us to see through a new lens. Here are some others ways to hear Solomon’s prayer: a discerning heart (NIV), understanding heart (KJV), discerning mind (CEB), and my favorite - Hebrew, of course - lev shome’a which means a listening heart.

For all that we know Solomon *has* done and *will* do after this point, Solomon is pure in *this* moment, in *this* prayer: give me a listening heart. The word “heart” is used over a thousand times in scripture, and most often, it means the **whole self** - all that is and isn’t and will be and all of it. Give me a listening **life**, Solomon asks. Give me a heart that puts not my own words and thoughts first but seeks your will above all else. Give me a heart that is a vessel, to be filled by your word. Give me transformation, Lord, for I am not yet what you will have me be.

Stewardship season can be habitual - something we know how to do and so we go about it as we always have. There’s something faithful in that discipline and ritual but there’s also something faithful in what Solomon shows us here. “I am and I am and I am **and** I will be by you alone, O God.” What the text tells us after Solomon roots his request in who he is and then takes a leap in asking for a growth beyond his imagination is that God is pleased by Solomon’s ask. Pleased, delighted, joy-filled that God’s own has come back into the fold and said, "I need you.”

Consider - like Solomon - where we’ve been, what we need to be, and who is around us. Consider the boxes of clothes packaged with love that the mission team will take to Thornwell Home for Children in a few weeks. Consider the bible studies that feed the souls of so many of you and those in our community. Consider the meals prepared and served in our kitchen and the Silver Linings Club that finds surprising friendships. Consider the spirit-filled music that fills our sanctuary with wonder. Consider our staff who work behind the scenes to embolden the work of the church. Consider our property - large, sometimes unruly, in need of constant care, ours to tend to in all manner of ways. Consider the many hands and feet and minds that make innumerable of things happen without us ever knowing it but we’d sure as heck be sorry if they didn’t do what they do - from lightbulbs to paper cutouts in Sunday school to tables cleaned to birthday cards sent.

Consider it. And then put it aside. It matters - it matters greatly. But what pleases God is when Solomon can move from *what he is* to *what he could be in God alone*. May we have listening hearts, friends. God is speaking - always has been, always will be. Amen.

**Prayers of the People**

We call upon you, for you will answer us, O God.

Incline your ear to us, hear our words.

While the world speaks with fire and fear, with vitriol and violence, with death and destruction, we will listen to Christ’s voice clear above the chaos: *Be not afraid.*

While the nation wonders what will be - what will be the way, what will be the answer, what will be the clarion call to draw us back together as one, we will listen to your words echo through time: *When you pass through the waters, I will be with you.*

While our community contends with the daily reminders of what is so desperately needed - food for the hungry, shelter for the innocent, treatment for the addicted, we rest upon Christ’s words as wisdom: *Truly, I tell you, just as you did it to the one of the least of these, you did it to me.*

While we lift up in name those on our hearts, we remember you were the one who called them by their first and truest name: child of God. We pray for:

The families of those killed in the massacre at Tree of Life Synagogue,

People who receive threats and make threats - may peace be the way…

For Charles, Lynda, Yvette, Andrew, Brownee, Angus, Sandy, Ann, Bill, Sara, Milton, Gayle, Gathy, Harriet, Del, Pat, Bob, Genie, and all those in service to our country.

It is in the strong and steady name of Jesus that we pray together, saying Our Father…

1. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, third edition, 2001, page 494. [↑](#footnote-ref-0)