“Why Preach? Why Listen?”
Isaiah 40:21-31; I Corinthians 9:16-23; Mark 1:29-39

The Rev. Timothy C. Ahrens
Senior Minister

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The First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ
444 East Broad Street, Columbus, OH 43215
Phone: 614.228.1741 • Fax: 614.461.1741
Email: home@first-church.org
Website: http://www.first-church.org
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“Why Preach? Why Listen?”

*Isaiah 40:21-31; I Corinthians 9:16-23; Mark 1:29-39*  
A note before preaching...Isaiah proclaims God’s majesty and glory. Paul in I Corinthians speaks of preaching in a celebrative, declarative way. But, this sermon will focus on the “preacher” Jesus.

Let us pray: *May the words of my mouth and the meditations of each one of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our salvation. Amen.*

Sometime in the early days of the first century, preaching became a way of life for Jesus and his followers. While preaching had always had a role for the prophets of Israel, a holy fire consumed the hearts and souls of the new heralds of God’s word as they boldly stepped forward to
speak aloud the good news of God stirring deep in their souls.

Within a few years, John the Baptizer, Jesus the Carpenter, Peter the Fisherman, and Paul, the itinerant Rabbi, tentmaker and first persecutor of the Christians converted into a Christian emerged as preachers of God’s Holy Word. History and scripture record that people came from everywhere to listen to these men who spoke of God in public – with a message of Faith, Hope, Love and Justice. They spoke with conviction and power. They were heralds of the Good News of God’s love – known to us in Jesus the Christ!

Twenty Centuries later, preaching still happens – sometimes with holy fire sometimes with just flickers of hope. But, undeniably, preaching and preachers have taken it on the chin. In recent surveys about preaching and preachers, cynicism and judgment in rising numbers greet those who step up to proclaim God’s Good News. Such cynicism is grounded in a lack of trust in the messengers themselves. Headlines don’t speak of conversions of hearts and minds to Jesus the Christ. Rather the bad news in the news has focused on abuse of power, questionable calling and twisted purpose. For those who still seek to follow God’s call to be heralds of love, to be witnesses for Jesus
Christ, preaching can seem like a burden and not a divine calling at times.

So, why preach? Why listen?

If you want an answer to either question, listen to the greatest preacher of all time and watch what he **DOES**. That’s right – pay attention to the actions of the preacher. We see in Jesus Christ that preaching comes from a healing heart, not a necessarily a resonant voice. The first child of Joseph and Mary uses his hands, his feet, and his eyes to preach. He preaches with his heart. As a herald of good news, he offers a healing touch, a listening ear and a heart of love. That’s what the “preacher” Jesus **does**.

In the Gospel of Mark, we read that upon leaving the synagogue, Jesus goes to Simon Peter’s home and there finds Peter’s mother-in-law sick in bed. If you know Capernaum, you know Peter’s house was about 20 yards from the synagogue, so Jesus doesn’t have much time to shift from proclamation to healing presence. He enters Peter’s home, takes the woman by the hand and lifts her up. She loses her fever, finds her feet and begins to serve them.

In the image of Christ, “preaching” begins when we take someone by the hand and lift them up. It is our hands reaching out and our arms lifting up that reflect true preaching. In so reaching out and so lifting, those who arise stand to serve others. St. Francis of Assisi speaks of such
preaching when he proclaimed, “Preach the gospel everyday; if necessary, use words.”

Jesus is not done with his action oriented “preaching.” That same evening, the Preacher finds all the sick and demon possessed folks in town outside the front door of Peter’s house. As a preacher, he heals again and silences the demons.

So, lesson number #2: preaching also involves silencing the demons.

In my experience Demons take many forms – some of them personified most of them internal. The ones who take on personifications remind me of Peeves, the trickster Poltergeist from Harry Potter’s books. Peeves makes noise when people want him to be quiet. He exposes secrets, turns over tables, floods the bathrooms and takes great pleasure in taunting everyone. His is a peevish character – literally. And he drives everyone crazy.

But, I see most of the demons that Jesus encountered were like most of the demons we encounter. They are not so much personified as personally haunting and disturbing. They are the forces within us that sow doubt or too much certainty. They show up as shame and arrogance; fear and denial; lying which hurts others and creates distrust between you and others. These demons make us sick, afraid and often unwilling and unable to serve God and others with all
our gifts. With these demons, we are unwilling and unable to take the risks necessary to bring out our true selves. They interrupt our lives. They distract us and unaddressed and left alone, they can cause us great harm. (Drawn from Nanette Sawyer, “Living the Word: Reflections on the lectionary,” 2/8/15, Christian Century, 2/4/15, p. 17).

So, what demons are standing outside the door to your life or settling into the living room of your soul? How are you addressing them? Jesus says simply, “Come Out!” or “Be Gone!” or “Get behind me!” With the certainty of a preaching healer, he knows that such demons drag us down, drain us, and tear at us from the inside. While Peeves is a pest, our demons unaddressed are destructive. Call them out. Tell them to leave you alone and stay in the past where they belong. Preach to them. Seek help. Find a way to get your demons out in the open. When such demons are cast into the light of day - into the light of God - they lose their power and ability to destroy. The Preacher of Nazareth knew this. He embodied this.

Lesson number #3: Preaching comes out of solitude and silence. Before words are formed in every God blessed sermon, silence is present. Hours of prayer proceed Jesus’ minutes of preaching. No preacher worth her or his salt speaks without solitude guiding their hearts. Perhaps the real problem with preachers today is that they preach what
they practice – constant motion with no time for prayer or solitude.

After healing Capernaum’s possessed and sick of body, mind, and soul, Jesus is a rock star. He is the greatest thing that ever happened in this lakeside town! But, rather than stick around for more action, Jesus flees to a deserted place outside of town. He needs to recover from the demands of people who suck his energy and give nothing in return. He needs restoration. Quite frankly, he needs to listen… to God. In the pre-dawn hours, Jesus seeks peace and the presence of God, whom he calls “Abba” or “daddy.” He needs to get away. With all the actions of preaching, he needs the solitude of reflection.

Preaching is not what you think it is. It is what Jesus does.

He speaks out of his deep listening to God. He heals out of his deep connection to God. He drives out demons by helping people see themselves and face their own soul sickness – not from his brow beating or haranguing the peevish poltergeists – but by calling people to reflect deeply, too. In the end, he seeks solitude over celebrity. He seeks God over getting up and making noise with words.

Why preach? In the Jesus’ model, preaching leads to change of heart and mind. Why listen? Perhaps when you listen you can learn something about yourself and your God
– and all the little Gods that compete with our God, the God to whom our Savior prayed and in whose presence he found solitude and peace.

In the week ahead, do as Francis did: “Preach the gospel everyday; if necessary, use words.” After all the call of the Gospel is for all of us to preach and listen. God didn’t create a Sunday morning box for a few. God created you to share good news with others…even if you must use words. Thanks be to God for preaching and listening. Amen.