

Pentecost 22, Proper 24  
St. Paul's/Resurrección, Mount Vernon, WA

October 20, 2024  
Rev. Paul Moore

## Look and Listen

My wife can tell you about a USAID program in central Africa when she was a girl. Concerned what was considered a lack of protein in the diet of the local people, the U.S. Government imported great quantities of powdered milk. Powdered milk is easy to transport and it has a long shelf life. The project was a failure in terms of its original intent. The villages did not have safe water to mix with the powdered milk. The product back then did not have the emulsifiers powdered milk has today. It was a very fine powder. Mixing it in water was a lot of work and you still ended up with lumpy milk that tasted funny. Finally, after weaning, the local diet did not include milk, which means virtually all adults were lactose intolerant.

However, the Africans are an intelligent and resourceful people. They found a use for the milk. When mixed with mud it dries to a hardpan that makes a good surface for roads and paths! It's a classic community development error. The writers of the grant did not stop to truly listen to the people. They did not assess their needs in terms of their own concerns and perceptions, but rather imposed a foreign model on what was observed and served up a comical disaster.

James and John, whom Jesus calls "Sons of Thunder," make the same mistake. They have been with Jesus for a while now. They have heard his teaching. They have seen his signs of power; they were part of the inner circle of three, Peter, James and John, and yet they still seem locked in a mindset that is foreign to Jesus. They haven't truly listened. They ask for something that is equally foreign to what Jesus is all about. Whatever imagined "glory" that Jesus was going to gain in this coming kingdom, they wanted a part of it. They wanted an early guarantee of favoritism. Maybe they were wanting to get the jump on Peter—I don't know.

In response, Jesus does a bit of a bait-and-switch. Perhaps it's a shock treatment to get them to step back and rethink. "Can you drink the cup I will drink? Can you endure the baptism I will endure?" "Of course we can!" (If that's what it takes.) Well, you will suffer in those ways, he says, but it hasn't got anything to do with positions of power. Their way of thinking is like powdered milk in rural Africa. It just doesn't fit. They haven't really looked or listened.

If they had, they would have seen that Jesus' way has little to do with positions of power and everything to do with positions of self-giving love. The three verses immediately

before this passage record one of Jesus' predictions of his crucifixion and resurrection. This story serves to say, *As you have seen me give of myself, as you will see me give myself, so you are to give of yourselves. Just like me, give yourselves to God for the sake of the world.* This is the true glory into which Jesus is leaning. This is the part they have failed to understand. They haven't really looked or listened.

To serve, then, first means taking a good, hard look and a very careful listen. We think we may know the need, but do we really? We think we know the solution, but are we asking the right questions, first?

On Monday night last week, Madison School held an International Festival. Booths offering food, images and information on half a dozen countries were set up. Karisse found an Ecuadorian lady, who with her two daughters, set up a booth on Ecuador and had the kids make little condor puppets. I helped—but I also took in the show. What I found amazed me.

What impressed me most was along one wall. There were tables set up with pieces 5th graders had written. Each of them told the story of what it is like to be a bilingual student. Now being a bilingual student is something that I can relate to. Moreover, I have studied it. I think I know something about it. What I found was that these 5th graders know ALL about it. Some of them drew pictures to help us understand. One of those pictures is on the front of the bulletin today. Take a close look. It opens the door on a very special world and gives us a peek inside.

Now, if we were to seek ways to serve these young people, what might we think about doing? To do that, we have to really see them, carefully listen to their hearts; really see and hear them—for who they are, and not for what we think they are, are afraid they might be, or hope they would be. We will have to set aside our own agendas for a while, pull back the edges of our own world long enough to let their world emerge before us in some small way.

Some of us did that with our sister congregation, Resurrección, several weeks back. We learned how to make an authentic Mexican taco lunch. Some of us didn't have a clue, and learned a lot. Some of us thought we knew—and learned better. All of us got to interact with wonderful people doing wonderful things. Some of us did that again just last night. We gathered here in the Parish Hall. We put on the Disney animated film, *Coco*, that unfolds the Latin American world in terms of our loved ones who have passed on. Over refreshments and tissues, we opened our hearts to another way of being in the world. We will have another opportunity on the evening of the 30th of this month. On Wednesday evening, the 30<sup>th</sup>, Resurrección is inviting us to help build to Altar del Día de

los Muertos. If you have been at St. Paul's at this time of year before, you know that of which I speak. It is quite a display in the back, covered in marigolds, and loaded with the favorite foods of our dead loved ones. After it is done, we will gather in the Nave for a discussion about its symbolism and its spirituality. We will compare it to other cultures' ways of relating to the deceased, including some aspects of ancient Irish Celtic practice and thought. Come, pull back the edges of your own world for a bit, open your eyes and your heart, and truly see.

Our Skagit elder friend, Kay Knott, taught me a phrase in Lushootseed the other day. She had told me of walking with a family who had lost several members of their family in two months. I know this is something she does frequently. I asked her, "How do you do it? How do you carry so much grief?" She told me, "*ha'th hutch*" Ha'th hutch means, *The wisdom of the head comes from the heart*. The head sees, the heart apprehends and understands. "I do it," she said, "because it needs to be done."

To be greatest is not the point, but rather to be a true servant. A true servant looks and listens carefully, opens the eyes and ears of the heart as well as the head, empties oneself of one's own presuppositions, and truly sees; truly hears. That way, the wisdom of the heart will inform the head and the will, and the world will be healed and restored.