

An Invitation to Let Go

Luke 12:13-21

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A week ago, I spent three days at Mercy Center in Madison, CT to attend my final year of the School for Celtic Consciousness. The founder and teacher, John Philip Newell, has written many books that we have read together throughout the years during our Awakening the Spirit book group. His first book is titled: *Listening to the Heartbeat of God*. It is a short but excellent book that I recommend to everyone. In it, he reintroduces the early Celtic Christian understanding of God. Based on the wisdom from the east, the early Celts believed that God is revealed through the gift of creation and the revelation of the Word. As people of faith, Newell teaches that we are to listen to the heartbeat of God. We are to listen and learn from the story of creation and the stories of the Bible from the center of our hearts.

Recently I have discovered a new podcast named Nomad. The British hosts refer to the listener as the “beloved listener.”

I believe this is the attitude in which we are invited to listen to our scripture today. How is Jesus inviting us to hear God’s heartbeat? How are we invited to incline our hearts so we can be the beloved listeners?

Our scripture passage in Luke 12 is not a particularly fun passage for a summer Sunday. It’s a hard story to hear as we reflect on the bounty of our lives compared to most of the people in the world. In our passage, a man asks Jesus to instruct his brother to divide the family inheritance. Jesus responds by saying: “Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?” Jesus warns those gathered to be careful to guard against all kinds of greed because our lives do not consist of the abundance of possessions. Jesus continues by telling the story of a farmer who had an abundance of crops and didn’t know where to store them. The farmer decided to tear down his two barns and build bigger ones. Once he stored all his crops in the bigger barns he told his soul that he had ample goods for many years to come so he could relax, eat and be merry. But then God spoke to him and said on this night your life will be demanded of you. “And, the things you have prepared, whose will they be? So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.”

It is quite easy for the preacher to take a story like this and wag her finger at the congregation while accusing people of being greedy and hoarding. It is a message for individuals and for all nations. While it is very clear that Jesus is talking about the corruption of excess greed, he’s also inviting us to shift our attention from protecting our possessions to focusing on being centered in God’s living presence. It is time to awaken to a different way of living. Jesus’ invitation is not about power and possessions, but about beloved listening to the heartbeat of God, the heartbeat of creation. That is where we will discover the true meaning of life.

Sometimes the invitation to Holy attentiveness comes to us from prophets who teach us to change our ways of living.

Some months ago, I came across a YouTube video of the then 15-year old Swedish teenager, Greta Thunberg, speaking in front of the UN. Greta has been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize because of her work organizing an international youth movement for Climate Justice. In her short 3 ½ minute talk, she spoke against the focus on luxuries for a few at the expense of many. She stated that the living planet, our biosphere, has been sacrificed for rich people's greed. Scientists now know that we are rapidly coming to a tipping point where our wonderful planet will no longer be able to sustain life, as we know it. She went on to state that she didn't care about political structures when those political structures only care about their power at the sacrifice of our planet. Speaking for Climate Justice that is a worldwide issue, Greta insisted it was time to change our ways and the youth would lead the way. She ended her speech by saying change is coming if we like it or not. Real power belongs to the people.

As beloved listeners to the sacred story of life, this young woman is asking each of us to examine our contribution to Climate Justice. It isn't about what we've got stored up in our barns but about the care of creation so life will continue for generations to come. Each of us needs to contribute to that preservation. This church needs to join with churches all over the planet and to be a carbon neutral building. As Christians, we are called to be faithful stewards of God's gift of creation. One of the significant questions of our times is to ask ourselves how we are shaping our lives, institutions and national priorities for Climate Justice. Are we storing up for our own needs or looking at the global issue?

Sometimes the invitation to sacred listening comes to us from mystics and speaks about the inward journey.

Another favorite teacher of mine is the Episcopal priest, Cynthia Bourgeault. She is known for a number of books on Centering Prayer, a form of Christian meditation, and other books such as, *The Wisdom Jesus*. She was one of the teachers who was interviewed on the Nomad Podcast that I love. On the podcast she spoke about what happens when we practice Centering Prayer for years and years. She referred to our Gospel Reading this morning as an example of Jesus' invitation to let go of our attachment to our possessions in order to experience the intimacy of God in our lives. Centering prayer is a simple form of prayer that comes to us from the Desert Fathers and Mothers. Each morning and evening we are instructed to sit down in a quiet place for 20 minutes and be silent. Each of us has a centering word such as love, light, peace – mine is an ancient mantra: *Maranatha*. It means "come Lord Jesus." As we sit in silence, we gently offer the prayer word. After a few moments, Cynthia instructs that we let go of the word in order to rest in our inner silence – the silence of God, or "the still small voice of God." If we find ourselves thinking about something – the grocery list, the next thing we need to do, an old memory from our childhood, we're instructed to offer the prayer word again in order to bring our attention back to the quiet stillness. Each time we find ourselves being interrupted by our thoughts is an invitation to let the thought go and return to the heartbeat of God. Over time, it is easier to be still, and Cynthia says that eventually the thoughts and the prayer word fall away.

We are left resting in the heart of God. This practice of prayer – of letting go into quiet – letting go into God – changes our outer lives as well because we discover a way of living in the world that embraces the everyday knowing that God is with us.

At the School of Celtic Consciousness, John Philip teaches that the 9th century mystic John Scotus Eriugena referred to God as the glow flow. Following up on this, John Philip says that we're invited to "let go into the glow flow of God."

I think this is the invitation of our scripture this morning – we are invited to practice and experience letting go of clutching to our possessions and our rigid ideas in order to rest in the glow flow of God.

It is my hope that in the coming summer days and nights you may be blessed by this sacred wisdom and experience the gift of resting in the glow flow of God. Amen.

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