

Talking Listening to My Neighbor Acts 8:26-40

I don't know if you ever look at sermon titles but I hope you did today. And the reason I hope you did today is because after I read the original title, 'Talking to Your Neighbor,' I realized that I had to emphasize something different. We spend too much time telling people to talk to their neighbor about faith without ever realizing that the most important thing we can do with our neighbor is listen.

So today I want to teach you something about listening. First is that we need to get close enough to listen and second when we have the opportunity to get close we need to listen, really listen. Because what our neighborhoods need most is more people who are willing to listen; and having listened can respond in ways that demonstrate the love of God.

As I conceived of this series on 'Who is My Neighbor' one of the most important things I thought we needed to explore was our relationship with our un-churched /de-churched/ searching/ seeking/ spiritually-confused neighbors. So I went on a quest to find someone who would be willing to share their life with us. I didn't have to look too far until I found someone willing.

Unfortunately, he could not be here today. But that's ok because we sat down a week ago and recorded a conversation. What I want you to do while this conversation plays is to realize that Kent could be your neighbor (he could even be your child). I also want you to listen and learn what could be the comments of your neighbors. One thing I *don't* want you to do is attempt to come up with an answer to Kent's responses; just listen.

[Video-Kent]

Questions:

1. Tell me a little about yourself. Who you are? What you do? Who are the significant people in your life?
2. What has been your past experience with the church (general)?
3. Why do you choose not to attend a church today?
4. You make a differentiation between faith and religion; explain that to me?
5. When it comes to issues about faith, or religion, what do you want people to know about you?
6. If you can say one thing to people of faith who attend church, what would that one statement be?

I really appreciate Kent being willing to open up and share where he is in his life. And I hope that you listened to Kent in a way that you were genuinely interested in him and how you could be a good neighbor to Kent and his family.

Remember that I told you earlier today I wanted you to learn about listening. The position for disciples of Jesus to take in their neighborhoods is one of listening. We need to move into proximity with our neighbors so as to develop an intimate relationship that hears the needs in their lives. Then we can live the Gospel in their midst in ways that meet those needs.

We see that demonstrated in our scripture lesson today. Read Acts 8:26-40

<http://bible.us/acts8.26-39.niv>

Here's the first lesson from Philip (v.26). Philip made himself available to God and placed himself in a position to be used by God.

If you remember our series on *Experiencing God* we discussed how God is always at work around us. Our biggest challenge is recognizing where God is at work and then making ourselves available. Philip was sensitive to God's work- he was available so that he could listen to others around him.

Now I want you to notice something about the Eunuch in this story. He could be any of our neighbors. If we update the story to today we could picture this traveler watching the latest news story on his iPhone and looking perplexed at the condition of the world.

The Eunuch is like our neighbors, like us at times, trying to figure out what God is saying or what is happening in the world.

Philip was in proximity to the Eunuch when he was asking questions about life. So what was Philip doing in being available to God at the right time and the right place- he was listening.

If you don't learn anything else today about your neighbor, learn this; your neighbor has questions about life and you need to be listening! (available)

Because Philip was listening he asked the right question at the right time.

If you look at verse 30, Philip teaches us something important about our listening. Be patient and wait for the invitation! If you are available and God is at work the opportunity will arise in which your neighbor will invite you into a conversation.

Notice that Philip merely asked "Do you really understand what you are reading?"

Having listened for the Eunuch to be ready, the scripture says that Philip proclaimed the Good News about Jesus. In Philip's case that proclamation involved showing Jesus to the Eunuch in the passage from Isaiah. But your opportunity to proclaim the Good News may come in other ways.

Let me give you an idea from this passage that Max Lucado wrote:

In Outlive Your Life, Max Lucado writes:

Long before the church had pulpits and baptisteries, she had kitchens and dinner tables. Even a casual reading of the New Testament unveils the house as the primary tool of the church. The primary gathering place of the church was the home. Consider the genius of God's plan. The first generation of Christians was a tinderbox of contrasting cultures and backgrounds. At least fifteen different nationalities heard Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost. Jews stood next to Gentiles. Men worshiped with women. Slaves and masters alike sought after Christ. Can people of such varied backgrounds and cultures get along with each other?

We wonder the same thing today. Can Hispanics live in peace with Anglos? Can Democrats find common ground with Republicans? Can a Christian family carry on a civil friendship with the Muslim couple down the street? Can divergent people get along?

The early church did—without the aid of sanctuaries, church buildings, clergy, or seminaries. They did so through the clearest of messages (the Cross) and the simplest of tools (the home).

Not everyone can serve in a foreign land, lead a relief effort, or volunteer at the downtown soup kitchen. But who can't be hospitable? Do you have a front door? A table? Chairs? Bread and meat for sandwiches? Congratulations! You just qualified to serve in the most ancient of ministries: hospitality.

Something holy happens around a dinner table that will never happen in a sanctuary. In a church auditorium you see the backs of heads. Around the table you see the expressions on faces. In the auditorium one person speaks; around the table everyone has a voice. Church services are on the clock. Around the table there is time to talk.

Hospitality opens the door to uncommon community. It's no accident that hospitality and hospital come from the same Latin word, for they both lead to the same result: healing. When you open your door to someone, you are sending this message: "You matter to me and to God." You may think you are saying, "Come over for a visit." But what your guest hears is, "I'm worth the effort."

Does your neighbor know that they are worth the effort?

If you are you listening to your neighbors; if you are you practicing genuine hospitality that develops relationships in which you can listen to and know your neighbors; then they will know they are worth the effort!

A few weeks ago I ended a sermon by telling you that your neighbors are listening to your life to see who you are. Well I hope you are listening to your neighbors because by listening you will find out who they are; and *when you know who they are, then you'll know what to do.*