

## LISTENING FOR GOD

During this Lenten Season, we have been learning and practicing the process of discernment. According to Ruth Haley Barton, in her book, *Pursuing God's Will Together* "discernment is the ever increasing capacity to "see" or discern the works of God in the midst of the human situation so that we can align ourselves with whatever it is that God is doing.

One of the first steps in practicing discernment is our willingness to listen for God. Most of us have been taught how to talk to God, but few of us were taught to listen for God. Prayer is a mutual conversation that God initiates. If we don't take the time to listen for God, we are missing an essential part of the process.

Too often, we treat God like a genie. We tell God what we want, and then we expect God to dispense three wishes. We want God to align with "our" will rather than the other way around.

Yet, Scripture reminds us that it is our responsibility and call to align ourselves with God's will because God is able to see our highest good, not just for us as individuals, but for us as a human family as well. My highest good is intertwined with yours. Our highest good is intertwined with the whole creation.

So, our first step in the discernment process is making intentional time to listen for God. It is important that we do this both individually and communally by asking ourselves questions that open our hearts and minds to God. Using daily spiritual practices like prayer, meditation, group spiritual direction, can provide us a disciplined space to examine these questions.

Some important questions for discernment are:

What have I seen God doing in my life and in the world lately?

What is God calling me/us to be?

How does God want me to use my gifts and talents?

Can I be indifferent to all choices except that will of God?

How do we know it is God we are hearing?

The last question "How do we know it is God we are hearing" is an important one.

In our March 17th midweek devotional (you can check it out on YouTube!) We looked at a process for wrestling with that very question.

The process is:

**Direction and Calling:**

How does this choice fit with the overall direction and calling of God on my life?

**Consolation and Desolation:**

Which choice brings inner peace and freedom?

Is there a growing sense of wholeness, authenticity, and congruence of who I am in God?

**Desire:**

What is my deepest and most authentic desire?

What do I seek?

**Scripture:**

Is this choice consistent with what I know about the mind and heart of Christ and his loving/redemptive purposes?

(Greatest Commandment/Great Commission) as interpretative lens

**Love:** What does love call for in this situation?

**Clarify Perspective:**

Take a step back and try to look at the bigger picture of what God is doing.

Is this choice consistent with God's larger purposes?

In a month, will this matter in terms of God's larger purposes?

**Community:** How does this choice fit with others' observations of who I am?

This is the process we will be using for our congregational discernment as we move into a new season of ministry and mission. I also would encourage you to use this process for your own personal discernment, especially as we navigate uncharted territory in the coming months.

As we try to patiently wait for a post-pandemic world, we have an opportunity (now) to wonder and pray and discern God's will. Having gone through this traumatic collective experience, it just might be that God's will may not look the same as it did a year ago when we entered the pandemic.

There is a deep tension between wanting to get back to normal and realizing that our normal has changed throughout the last year. With discernment, we can receive the wisdom to distinguish between the things to retain and the things to let go.

The good news is that we are “in this together”. As long as we keep our ears open and our eyes focused on God, we will move faithfully into a future with hope. As long as we are willing to ask for God’s guidance and wisdom, we will be given the clarity and wisdom we seek.

I offer this prayer by Rev. Nadia Bolz-Weber:

**I am so afraid that I will never be who I once was. And I am also afraid that I will be. (Not to mention, I’m not entirely clear what size jeans I wear as the me I am now) And yet, when I quiet my anxious thoughts, I start to suspect that I am now closer to the me you have always known and always loved. So, help me trust that, Lord. As things change, help us be gentle with ourselves and with each other. We are all wearing newborn skin right now. Amen.**

*Peace and Light,  
Pastor Sharon*