

## Daily Devotional, December 1, 2020 Won't You Be My Neighbor?

<sup>13</sup> *To answer before listening—that is folly and shame.* <sup>15</sup> *The heart of the discerning acquires knowledge, for the ears of the wise seek it out. Proverbs 18:13, 15 (NIV)*

In a world that is so polarized and divided, one of the ways we can be a neighbor is by listening – and not just listening – but also attempting to understand others' points of view. In this election year when the rhetoric was so super-charged, how often did we want to know what someone else was thinking? Too often when we're engaged in debate, we're too busy thinking about what we're going to say next instead of listening. Many times, we don't want to hear a person's grievances. We just parrot back talking points we've heard on cable TV or the radio or from a political candidate.

I think people want to be heard. They want to be understood. When that doesn't happen over a long period of time, they get angry. They may isolate themselves from others who they believe don't share their views. Being a neighbor means caring about what someone thinks. It doesn't mean you have to share their views or grievances. It simply means you care enough to hear them out... to consider another person's point of view.

It seems to me many people were shocked in 2016 when Donald Trump was elected President. We didn't all believe someone so controversial could ever be elected President. I think the issue was that folks had not come to grips with the anger from people who supported Trump. It was too easy to dismiss them as not being serious and to look at them as somehow inferior. These were people who felt they had no voice when it came to a world that was changing rapidly around them. Change can be scary. Some had lost their jobs in factories and coal mines. They believed that people crossing the border illegally were taking their jobs. They believed the government had bailed out the big banks and Wall Street in 2008 but didn't care about them. For better or for worse, Trump became their voice.

If you are a liberal or moderate voter, when was the last time you sat down with a Trump supporter and really heard them out? By the same token, if you're a traditionalist or conservative worried about the inclusion of gays in the life of the church, have you ever sat down and talked to a mother or father whose son is gay? When was the last time you sat down to talk to an African American citizen and ask them what it feels like to be stopped by police when they're walking through a predominantly white neighborhood? Or have you ever spent time visiting with a police officer and asking them what it feels like to stop a car for a routine traffic violation, never knowing for sure what to expect when they get out of their police car and approach the other vehicle?

Jesus took time to listen. When blind Bartimaeus asked Jesus to stop and have mercy on him, Jesus did. Jesus could have kept on going. In fact, his followers encouraged him to do so. They told Bartimaeus to keep quiet, that Jesus had bigger fish to fry. He was on his way to Jerusalem. But Jesus listened and asked Bartimaeus, "What do you want me to do?" Jesus always found time to hear people's concerns, their fears, and their needs. And also, to do what He could to help them. No problem was too large or too small.

If you want to be a better neighbor this year, take time to stop and listen, to hear and to care... no exceptions.

***Prayer: Most Gracious God, we don't really listen to each other all of the time. My companion talks, then I talk. But what we're really concentrating on is how to make our points strongly and how to outshine the person we're talking with. Teach us to listen as Your Son listened to everyone who spoke with Him. Remind us that, somehow, You are trying to reach us through our friend. Your truth, Your love, Your goodness are seeking us out in the truth, love and goodness being communicated. When our words are harsh, hostile, or angry, we convey the very opposite of those qualities. Teach us to be still, Lord that we may truly hear our brothers and sisters-and, in them, You. Amen.***