

Do you remember 20-25 years ago, there was a regular commercial with this young man up on top of mountains, out at sea, in every different part of the world, forever repeating "CAN YOU HEAR ME NOW?" That is the question of our times! Not about Cellphone reception! All humanity have become divisive, polarized, so angry and hurt we are unwilling and incapable of listening to others/even of listening to GOD. Added to which there are FEARS of INFLATION, of COVID, of TAKING RIGHTS Away, of WORLD CHANGES! I remember when President Kennedy was shot and the whole world stopped, not just Democrats or Republicans, the whole world. I recall the race riots and protests, I recall Watergate & President Nixon. What I remember most was a favorite Uncle coming to visit that Summer, as he spent the entire time in the car alone, isolated from everyone else, trying to control his shattered world.

The Book of Samuel is a fascinating part of the Bible, coming after the EXODUS, after Moses and Judges // and before David creates a Monarchy. The Book of Judges ends when the Nation of Israel lost the Ark of the Covenant in battle to the Philistines! This created cultural upheaval! Loss of Identity & Loss of Faith. Without the Ark, Israel does not have the 10 Commandments! They are naked, hurt, angry and afraid, for the first time since Moses received from the LORD. The question is: if GOD is with Israel or not?! Added to which, the leader they have left, the Priest Eli has grown old, his sons corrupt, "Visions of the LORD have been rare". Which causes me to wonder, WAS THE WORD OF THE LORD RARE in those days, is the Word of the Lord rare in our times, or are we simply unwilling, unable to listen and hear a right?

At just such a time of crisis, GOD spoke to the young child Samuel, who had been made a ward of Eli. There could be a lovely sermon about INNOCENCE being Called by GOD, the little boy called in the night; but Today's passage goes further, to include this promise from GOD: "I am about to do a new thing that will make both ears of anyone who hears it tingle." Imagine, a RADICAL CULTURAL IDEA, FOR GOOD. The end of the War with Germany, with Japan. NOT JUST FOR SOME, but for everyone! "BOTH EARS OF EVERYONE WHO HEAR OF IT, WILL TINGLE!"

This is where we are as the Church today. We know who we are, not deceiving ourselves about our past. For decades, we have waited for the Owls to return outside the window. But The Owls are gone, and Hummingbirds have taken their nesting place! Demographic estimates are that Green Valley is to increase by about 10% - 12% over the next decade, and in that time our median age is going to drop by 4-5 years! Several of you have sent me articles from the NY Times about AMERICA'S GROWING NEED for Community, for Mental Health, and the CHURCH being ready-made: Community! What if GOD is going to do something TINGLY?

What if, what GOD is about to Call us to do, is not about rebuilding our former glory, trying to go back to the way things once were; what if instead, this is about doing something completely "out of the box?" Something like those who used to be SLAVES BECOMING the Greatest Monarchy on the face of the Earth! What if instead of Pastors wearing Black Academic robes or even White Robes, what if we wore the robes of our Church's Missions? To remind us all of the work we do. Then again, our Session proposed an idea completely out of the box, that neither the Pastors nor the Choir wear robes?! I am not talking about stripping to Pink Pajamas, or wearing shorts and flip-flops; only that those leading the worship of GOD would dress like all of you? Like all those with whom we worship? What if, we were less concerned about how we dress, how we look, and instead focused upon the needs of those around us?

Mark's Gospel tells us, Jesus and his disciples were walking through a field on the Sabbath, when as they were hungry, the Disciples began plucking grain to eat. Some Pharisees began to chastise them, because according to the Law you could not harvest crops or prepare food on the Sabbath. So how many seeds of

grain constitute a Harvest? How many handfuls of a snack represents a meal? John Calvin's definition of SIN, is Anything you hide from yourself, from your partner, the world, anything for which you feel broken.

There is a story of the Holocaust, told by a man of when he was a young boy, on a train with his mother going to the Concentration Camp. Her child was hungry and she used the last coins she had to buy him a small sandwich. The boy asked his mother why she was crying and she described that all her life she kept Kosher, and now on the way to Death, she needed to give her son a non-kosher sandwich! That mother understood the dilemma of the Pharisees. No, it was not wrong to save a life on the Sabbath, but how do we keep what is HOLY, what is SACRED, what is DIVINE, as we question what we have always known?

Jesus uses Hebrew Scripture to defend his disciples, saying to the Pharisees Do you remember King David? This is like saying to Democrats, Do you remember Kennedy? To Republicans Do you remember Reagan? Jesus describes a setting where King David and his Soldiers in Battle were starving, and David took Bread dedicated for Worship!

Years ago, like our own, a church prepared the Sacrament of Communion the day before. A man happened to come into the Church, who took the bread and ate it, leaving a note saying Thank You. After people were outraged, someone named that he must have needed the bread far more than they; and at that morning's Worship of GOD communion became the Cup of Forgiveness only.

Another time, when in an ecumenical retreat, all of the Pastors & Priests gathered together recognizing how much we want to be one body together, yet our churches are very divided. Those present agreed to share the cup of hope and pray together, knowing we are not ready to break bread together!

It is unclear why Mark places these stories about Grain & the Withered Hand together, except both deal with Jesus conflict on Sabbath days... A Synagogue was not the Temple, a Synagogue is more like our Fellowship Hall a Community Center. Mark makes clear this is a set-up, that the Pharisees were watching, waiting to catch Jesus in what they believe he will do. There is a man with a withered hand, which strictly according to the Law would have made the man an outcast as Unclean, particularly if it were his right hand. Some stories have been suggested that he was a Carpenter and Stone Mason, who no longer could feed his family, fulfill his vocation, because of the hand. Jesus does not bring the man up to a Chancel or Altar (a place for sacrifice), Jesus calls him to the Center of the people. Jesus does not touch the man's hand, or bathe it, he does not say words, all Jesus does is to invite the crowds to SEE.

The text does say that Jesus was filled with ANGER and HURT, which is ODD because while the Scriptures describe GOD's Wrath, this is the only occasion in MARK where Jesus is described using the words ANGER and HURT. The Man's hand is healed with Jesus not saying or doing anything. So technically, Jesus had not DONE ANYTHING on the Sabbath; where hypocritically the Pharisees, on the Sabbath, went out and PLOTTED how to kill him.

To those who have ears to hear: LISTEN