

Editorial: Listening for God amid sorrow, anger and unrest

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We share at least one thing in common: We want to be heard.

We want to be heard by each other. We also want to be heard by God.

With so many messages vying for our attention—including this editorial—knowing what exactly needs our attention and what we need to listen to can be overwhelming. One thing is certain, though. Amid all of it, God is speaking to us. Are we listening?

So much is happening in our world. Top stories involve intense strife in China and Taiwan, Russia and Ukraine, Iran, Afghanistan, Myanmar, Nigeria—just to name a few places. News about the pandemic and vaccines is an ongoing roller coaster. Taken together, no wonder we are overwhelmed.

The world is full of tension and strife indeed, and God is speaking to us in and through it.

Listening opportunities

Closer to home, racial tension continues unabated, being further enflamed when Officer Kim Potter [shot and killed](#) Daunte Wright on April 11. Protests began not long after the incident. Potter resigned April 13. Police Chief Tim Gannon, who also resigned April 13, believes Potter meant to tase Wright.

Potters' and Gannon's resignations seem to have been in response to the unrest. Mike Elliott—mayor of Brooklyn Center, a suburb of

Minneapolis—said “he hoped (the resignations) would help heal the community and lead to reconciliation after two nights of protests and unrest.”

Did protest produce resignations? Is this what listening means?

A similar story is unfolding in Collin County, North Texas. Marvin Scott III was arrested in Allen on March 14. After exhibiting “strange behavior,” officers took him to Texas Health Presbyterian Hospital and then to the Collin County Jail.

At the jail, officers restrained Scott, pepper sprayed him and covered his head with a spit hood. He later became unresponsive and was taken to a hospital, where he was pronounced dead.

Seven officers were put on administrative leave before being fired. The *Texas Tribune* reports “another resigned while under investigation.” Scott’s family and others have protested outside the county jail for four weeks and [pledge to “remain](#) until the officers are arrested.”

If the officers are arrested, will the county have listened?

What does listening mean in situations like this?

Listening defined

Listening is an intentional action; it doesn’t happen by accident. Listening is a matter of will.

To listen, we must focus our attention, turn off our expectations of what will be or should be said, and set aside—at least, initially—judgment about what is said. Listening takes our whole self—body, heart and mind.

Listening doesn’t mean we go along with or bless everything we oppose.

Listening doesn't necessarily require giving up our convictions, though listening may sharpen or correct them. Listening does require us to be more fully aware of our convictions—where we stand—and our boundaries—where we stop and the other starts.

Listening usually takes longer than we expect, often taking a long time. We have to listen past the emotional outbursts and the smokescreens to hear what is underneath or behind expressions of anger, fear or shame. Listening is uncomfortable.

Listening is hard. I can describe it far easier than I can—or will—do it. So much of the time, I'm too preoccupied to really listen.

Perhaps nothing is more important for us to do in these days than to listen, so we may know how best to seek God's will on earth.

If we listen in this way to the family of Daunte Wright and to the protesters, what will we hear? And the police officers and governing officials, if we listen to them, what will we hear?

Likewise, if we listen in this way to the family of Marvin Scott III, to the protesters with them at the Collin County Jail, and to the police officers and governing officials, what will we hear?

If you're like me—and I bet you're pretty close—you're already trying to tell me what we will hear.

Listen deeper

Don't listen only to them. Listen to what God is telling us.

As we listen to all who are involved directly in the life and death of Wright and Scott, we also must listen for God.

What is God telling us in the mothers' cries, in the protestors' yells, in the police officers' explanations, in the local officials' searching for resolutions?

What is God telling us in our reactions to all of it?

We have in the Bible God's words, commands and expectations. We have within us the constant, living Holy Spirit. Both help us to hear and discern what God is saying to us in the sorrow and anger.

Throughout Scripture, God engaged people with a mixture of compassion, provision, and a call to repentance and faithfulness—though who was called to repent was not always the one expecting it.

God also gives us the Holy Spirit, who leads attentive people, and wise and godly people gifted by that same Spirit in ways we are not.

As God's people, our charge is to listen to and obey our God. This listening is hard indeed, because inevitably we will hear things we don't want to hear and be called to do what this world doesn't want.

Listening takes practice

We may not be able to affect so much of what is happening in our world. We may feel overwhelmed, like a grain of sand on the shore trying to push back the sea. But even there, God is speaking.

We can practice listening close to home, where if we will listen attentively, we will hear the human being under the layers of hurt, anger, shame, fear, prejudice, bitterness or self-defense—the person created in God's image, the person Jesus loves and died to save.

Listening is an act of love. Christ's love compels us. Who will we listen to today?

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