

“Incarnational Listening”

By Rebecca Hines

“Grant that I may not so much seek...to be understood, as to understand...” From the “Prayer of Francis of Assisi”

The great challenge in listening is to quiet our inner dialogue long enough to really allow the other person to feel that they are seen, heard and understood. To pause, slow down and be curious as to how the other person is experiencing this world, to really sit in their seat and ask what it is like to be them?

Jesus is an excellent role model of this practice. The Gospels show that in every interaction He was fully present to all people no matter who they were, what station in life, age, gender, their weaknesses, economic status, etc. He treated them all with equal value and listened with love. He listened to the Samaritan woman at the well, the man with leprosy, the rich young ruler, and Nicodemus, a powerful Pharisee, etc. He did these things being wholly/fully loving.

I often ask myself; how can I listen incarnationally to the other person? As I have heard this invitation, I have looked for examples & inspiration to allow myself to fully receive this wisdom of deep listening. One concept that has supported my path is Martin Buber’s “I-Thou” idea that describes how people relate to others in a mutually respectful, non-judgmental and authentically loving way. In this way of relating there is no competition, no assuming I’m right or better than the other, it holds space for “my dignity is equal to yours”, “my needs are equal to yours”, etc. A natural building of solidarity with the other, letting go of our ego grasping to really connect in mutual respect and love.

So, what does it mean to listen incarnationally like Jesus did? To listen at the heart level with empathy, respectfully engaged and attuned to another human? To be a healing presence to those around us, accepting ourselves and the “thou” just as we are, where we are without judgement and peace in our hearts?

I don’t know about you but for me this is a hard path to walk. I think for each of us finding our path to incarnational listening may look different, likely including a lot of prayer, humility and letting go. I know for me I’m invited to notice and observe, befriend my emotions, embracing empathy & non-judgement, listening for needs and respecting requests. Incarnational listening remains one of the most significant ways we can practically demonstrate love for others. As we invite this practice into our lives, we are serving Christ as his hands and feet.

In addition, consider that God became incarnate. Becoming human was the ultimate way to listen to us, sit in our seat and understand us in a profoundly compassionate way. May we experience this deep solidarity with our human experience as we reflect on Christ’s life. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us!

May we all find ways of being people of peace, compassion and empathy in the coming year.

(Thanks to Rebecca Hines for this article and for sharing her giftedness. She serves as a Spiritual Director, contemplative practice leader & labyrinth facilitator. She also enjoys Enneagram/Myers-Briggs Personality Type coaching and is passionate about creating welcoming and safe spaces for people to explore their spiritual journeys. She enjoys serving our upstate community in various roles such as a Servant Leader with The Anchorage.)

**NOTE* Rebecca is leading 2 free labyrinth prayer walks for The Anchorage. Details in the flyer on our website.*