

Let anyone with ears listen!

Matthew 13:1-9

July 12, 2020

Let me begin with a story from the Sufi religion.

Nasrudin was a little man who, every day, would hitch a donkey to a wagon filled with straw and drive it to the border separating his country from the neighboring country. The border guards would search the wagon before letting him cross. They were sure that he was smuggling something, but they could never find it. Each day the pattern would be repeated, the wagon would be searched, sometimes the straw would be tossed in the air, but they could find nothing. So, they had to let him cross.

Years passed and Nasrudin got wealthier and wealthier. Finally, he decided that he had enough money. He announced his retirement and threw a party for the border guards. At the party, they said, "Nasrudin, we know you have been smuggling something for all these years, but we have not been able to catch you. Now that you are retiring, tell us what you have been smuggling." Nasrudin smiled and said, "Donkeys!"

They had eyes to see but failed to see. How about us? Don't we look at without seeing, like these border guards?

Many of us have been reading a chapter of the Bible every morning since Monday, June 1st. We read the Gospel of Matthew first and now we are in the middle of reading the Gospel of Mark. I have been sending COD and VOD each morning. COD stands for not, Cash on Delivery, but Chapter of the Day and VOD Verse of the Day.

I remember my VOD, verse of the Day last Monday. It is Mark 8:18. Jesus says, "Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear?" I

heard the Lord asking me, “Kun Sam, you have eyes to see. Do not fail to see. You have ears to hear. Do not fail to hear.”

From this morning’s Bible lesson from the Gospel of Matthew, we hear the Lord saying, “Anyone with ears listen!” (Matthew 13:9) This is today’s VOD, Verse of Day. I hear once again the Lord saying to me, “Kun Sam, do you have ears? Then listen.”

Last Sunday we affirmed once again that faith is more than just believing in God and radically depending on God, our Creator and Provider, the center of the universe. Trusting in God who loves and cares about us is a surest way to make our brief earthly journey meaningful and wonderful. We need God and belong to God. God knows it and keeps inviting us to “Come to me, and I will give you rest!”

Yes, we believe in God. We believe that God is with us. So, joining our Canadian Christian sisters and brothers, we confess, “We are not alone. God is with us.” (The New Creed) We believe also God is at work in our midst and in the world.

Now, I have a question for you and me this morning. “Have you ever encountered God who is with you? Have you ever seen God at work in your life? Have you heard God speaking to you?”

We believe in God. We claim that God is here and at work. But the question is “Where do you see and hear God at work?”

I think Jesus is right. We do have eyes but fail to see. We do have ears but fail to hear.

Why? It is not because of God's absence or God's silence, but our blindness and deafness. Our eyes and our ears need to be opened to see and hear God.

One thing we need to keep in mind.

We fail to see God because we expect God appear when and where something miraculous or extraordinary happens. We fail to hear God because we expect God speak at a certain place and at a certain time.

Today's lesson is about the sower of the parable. One thing we learn from this parable is God is The Sower. God, The Sower has a unique and interesting way of scattering the seeds. Unlike any human sower, God the Sower scatters the seeds all over the places indiscriminately and generously: On the path, on the rocky place, on the thorny place and also on the good soil. What does it tell us? It tells us that God's work is omnipresent, meaning every place. God is at work all over the place.

God may speak to us at any time and at any place as God freely chooses. Any conversations can be God's tool to speak to us. Any meetings can be a place where we encounter God. Any incidents can be God's way of reaching out and speaking to us. Any books and movies can be places we may hear God speaking. Any unwelcoming and welcoming interruptions can be God's way to reach out to us and to heal us.

We will miss most of what God is doing if we look for God only in the expected places and at the expected times. Yes, if we want to see the hand of God at work; if we want to hear the voice of God, then we must look everywhere. We must listen to everything. We must pay attention all the times and all the places. Then, every day will be full of wonderful surprises for us to hear and see God at work.

Every morning these days I wake up to hear birds chirping outside the windows. To me, their chirping sounds like God singing a morning song for me. “The Morning has broken!”

Every morning, I am thankful that we do read a chapter of the Bible. Reading the Bible is a sure way to listen to God speaking to us.

Yesterday, my VOD was “Keep awake!” I heard God talking to me, “Kun Sam, keep awake!” “Keep awake to see what I am doing in this world and in your life today. Keep awake to hear what I am speaking to the world and to you today.”

Last week I had a chance to visit Mary Carreau, one of us. She lives alone in her house. She has tons of things to take care of by herself, including lawn mowing, trimming trees, fixing fences, organizing the garage, etc. She will be 80 years old in coming October.

“How are you, Mary?” She told me, “I am tired.” Exactly she is tired of doing so many household chores by herself. But I found something strange. She neither looked gloomy nor sounded whining. To my surprise, her face was shining and her voice bright. “What is going on here, Mary? You are tired physically, but you do not look tired.” With a big smile on her face, she told me how happy and thankful she is. “Pastor Cho, I have been enjoying watching a family of deer coming near the house every morning and evening. And I see a fox and rabbits visiting me, as well. Birds are coming, as well.” She enjoys their daily visit and feeds them with joy.

I saw God at work in Mary’s life, a caring God who sends deer, fox, rabbits and birds to her and enables her to take one day at a time with thanksgiving and joy. I saw God providing Mary with what she needs now.

Do you see God at work in your life? Do you hear God whispering today? We have been in pandemic crisis for a long time now. We are awakened to see no one, no family, no nation is independent. We see we are interdependent.

Before the pandemic, we thought there would be a clear line between sick people and healthy people. “You are sick. That means, I am not sick.” But now this way of thinking has been changed upside down. If I am sick, you are sick. When I am sick, my family is sick. When my family is sick, your family is sick. My state is sick? Your state is sick, as well. My nation is sick? Their nations are sick and all the nations are sick.

I hear God whispering all the people in the world and all of us at Fairfield Grace, “Remember you are one global family and you are all connected and interdependent. Be at peace with one another (Mark 9:50)”

The systemic racism in our nation is another virus to impact all of us painfully. It destroys our human interconnectedness. It destroys the dignity of God’s masterpieces, humanity. It destroys our society. Do you hear what God is saying to all of us lately? This is what I hear.

I hear God speaking in tears, “What do you see, Kun Sam? Do you see white people? Do you see black people? Do you see Latinos and Latinas? Do you see Native Americans?” God continues to say, “Can you see all these beautifully diverse people? Can you see they are my children created in my image? Please honor and respect and love them. Do all things you can do to bring justice and peace for my precious children, your sisters and brothers!”

The Lord challenges us this morning, asking, “Do you have eyes but fail to see? Do you have ears but fail to hear?”

So our prayer this morning is “Open my eyes, that I may see glimpses of truth thou hast for me;” “Open my ears, that I may hear voices of truth thou sendest clear; Silently now I wait for thee. Ready, my God, thy will to see. Open my ears, illumine me, Spirit divine” Amen. Amen.