

Listening to God

In these summer months among conservative leaders in the Diocese of Pittsburgh, we have taken a season to listen to God, including fasting and prayer and scripture and listening carefully to one another. The season upon us is challenging and confusing. God is evidently pruning his vineyard. But what are we to do? How do we respond to the rejections of the Episcopal Church? To the leadership of the Primates? To our own Diocesan leadership? How do we build ministries that will have a future? Protect our parishes? What is God pruning in us? In all these matters, I have found myself less trusting of my own instincts, and more attentive to God. I know many of us feel the same.

Large events are scheduled for the fall: our House of Bishops meet with the Archbishop of Canterbury to respond to the Primates in September, Common Cause Bishops meet after that, the Primates will certainly weigh in, and our own Diocesan Convention will meet in November.

A clear sight of what God is doing and what God is saying is essential in this time. In order to help our prayers, I send to you the following questions developed by Mary Zahl, and used in a talk she gave this summer at the Mt Carmel Ministries center in Alexandria, Minn. Listening to God and others has been a passion for Mary for some years, and a 'grace gift' in her own life and ministry. She shared these with me this past week, and I immediately asked her if I could send them on to you. For me they were clarifying, pushing my summer prayers deeper.

"These are my questions:

- *What is the prayer? (ask God to show me)*
- *What is the prayer (emotion) under the prayer?*
- *What is the 'God's eye view' [upon this matter]?*
 - *what does He see? hear? feel?*
 - *what does He long for?*
 - *what makes Him sad? what delights Him?*
- *What scripture comes to mind?*

My experience with this sort of questioning is that when God gives me the prayer, the faith that enables more effective prayer comes with it. I have the sense of 'asking according to His will', rather than struggling with/against him, trying to 'twist his arm' to give me what I want. The latter (struggling prayer) also reveals my own false picture of the Father, who in fact longs to give good gifts to his children."

As I have spent time in prayer these past weeks, I have found myself digging more deeply into the scriptures. Here are some of the passages (in no particular order) that have caught my attention and fueled my prayers:

Gen 12 & Heb 11: *By faith he went... no knowing where he was going...*

Psalms 6, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143: Psalms of confession

Matt 13: the parables of the weeds and the net

Luke 5: *no one pours new wine into old wineskins...*

John 15: *every branch that bears fruit, he prunes...*

Heb 12: *what son is there whom his father does not discipline?*

Matt 18: *if a brother sins against you...*

Rom 13 & Acts 4: submission to authority

Acts 5: Gamaliel's wisdom

1 Cor 4: *people curse us and we bless...*

1 Cor 5: *I actually hear reports of sexual immorality among you...*

1 Cor 6: *you suffer defeat by going to law with one another.. why not be defrauded?*

2 Cor 4: *we are hard pressed... hunted... struck down...*

2 Cor 6: Isa 52: *Do not team up with unbelievers...*

2 Cor 11-12: *my power is most fully seen in weakness*

Heb 10:32-39: *you cheerfully accepted the seizure of your possessions...*

I also want to recommend a book to you, "The Jesus Way" by Eugene Peterson. It is a provocative read, setting out the antecedents to Jesus' statement "I am the way..." in the lives of Abraham, Moses, David, Elijah, Isaiah of Jerusalem and Isaiah of the Exile. He then contrasts the way of Jesus with several contemporary alternatives (Herod, Caiaphas, and Josephus). The parallels today are clear, challenging, and firmly linked to our present difficulties. You can find a review of the book by Richard Kew here: <http://richardkew.blogspot.com/2007/07/kind-of-applies-review-of-eugene.html>

Looking forward to our time later this month.

In confidence of his Kingdom...

Geoff Chapman