

Come Alive: Holy Listening and Testimony

Holy Listening

Holy listening is very different from every day listening, where often we listen to what is being said only enough to form a response. Holy listening invites us to slow down, take a look around, and create space between us to speak the truths of our lives out loud to one another. We focus on the speaker, as the listener practices a disciplined posture of care, hospitality, relaxed awareness, and attentiveness. We are invited to listen to another person in the way we listen to scripture. Douglass Steere writes of the sacred nature of this practice: “To ‘listen’ another’s soul into a condition of disclosure and discovery may be almost the greatest service that any human being ever performs for another.”

God is revealed to us in the stories of scripture, and in the stories of God’s community. When we gain the ability to listen to one another deeply, we may begin to notice the presence of God in other people’s stories—and more and more in our story as well. Creating a space for those stories to live and move is part of creating a community where we all have room to discover our gifts and become who God is creating us to be.

When have you experienced this kind of listening?

Testimony

Testimony is the practice of sharing with honesty the stories that give meaning to our lives. In some churches, it means standing up to tell your conversion experience or personal salvation story. Testimony can include these stories but can also be seen more broadly. Dori Baker and Joyce Ann Mercer encourage us in this practice not only to focus on “God’s already-finished action in the world” but also to testify of those moments that have “been tucked into the seams of everyday living” because “in the presence of an artful listener, we may better be able to discern a pattern of calling, claiming, and ongoing revelation woven through these life events.” Testimony is simply telling the truth of our lives out loud to one another. As we share stories about our lives, we testify to our truths.

What images or connotations does the word “testimony” evoke in you? What memories of “testimony” do you have from your upbringing?

Practice: Holy Listening and Testimony

Find a partner and decide who will share first, and who will share second.

You will have 2 minutes in silence to think, and then 2 minutes each to share your story.

Listeners: Make eye contact. Give your full attention. Pretend that you have all the time in the world.

Storytellers: Speak from your heart. Don’t worry about having a beginning, middle and end.

Add details to draw us in to the story, try to be specific and descriptive.

Tell a story about a time when someone took you or your gifts seriously.

Discussion/Journal Questions

How did it feel to talk about your gifts? Was it hard? Easy? Embarrassing? Exciting?

How did it feel to be listened to without interruption? Does that happen very often in your life?

How did it feel to listen to someone without speaking? What did you find yourself thinking about?

How do you think our relationships and communities might be different if people listened to each other in this way?

How do you know what your gifts are? Who has been part of naming those gifts for you? What else helped you discover what your gifts are and to put them to use?

Where do you find your deep gladness meeting the world's deep hunger? How does it feel when you use your gifts in a way that serves others?