

## **God spreads his word through others.**

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During a trip home last fall to visit my Mom and Dad at their new home with the Little Sisters of the Poor, I remembered that an old high school friend lived nearby. Although I had not talked to Scott for a few years, we ran cross country and track together in high school and had been pretty good friends. He was a very good runner – in fact he was the Indiana State CC champion our senior year – and I was very fortunate to know him and run with him. Scott went on to become a teacher and returned to teach and coach at the high school we attended. He's now been teaching there for 32 years. Since college I've only talked to or texted with him about once every 2-3 years, but on that trip to visit my parents I was able to meet up with him and his wife for a couple hours. It was great to reconnect and I learned that Scott's elderly Mother is in a nursing home not far from where my parents live and that Scott is experiencing a lot of the same challenges as

my siblings and I. Since that weekend we talk at least every other week. Scott has offered an open ear and open heart. He is on the same journey with his Mom as I am with my Mom and Dad and he has offered his kindness, understanding and willingness to listen. Our conversations have even gone beyond our aging parents.

A few weeks ago, we were talking about our own personal experiences of getting older and agreed that what we enjoy most in life these days has changed. Scott kinda surprised me, though, when he told me that what he enjoys most at this stage of his life is just sitting and listening to other people talk about their lives and their experiences. He explained that he has become genuinely interested in people, what is important to them and why those things are important to them. He explained that as he has gotten older he has come to appreciate that you can learn a lot about a person and about life in general if you are truly interested in them, in what they have to say and if you are truly willing to listen and hear them. Scott actually gave me an example. He said he will often initiate conversations in the teachers lounge at lunch

by asking a provocative question. He recently sat down with a group of teachers and posed the question: “If you could only keep your sense of sight or your sense of hearing, which would you choose?” He said this question led to a fascinating discussion and revealed a lot about what people value in life. He recalled that one teacher answered that she would choose to give up her sight because she feels like she has seen enough to have enough reference points to create a scene in her mind’s eye if someone describes it to her but that she believed it would be very difficult to never hear her loved ones speak to her again.

While driving one day shortly after this conversation with Scott I caught an episode of the show, “Hidden Brain” on the radio. The title of the episode was ["The Best Years of Your Life"](#) and during the episode Dr. Laura Carstensen, professor of psychology at Stanford University, shared that multiple studies over the past several years have concluded that older people are much happier than previously believed by psychologists.

According to Carstensen this has everything to do with how we perceive time at different stages of our lives. According to Carstensen, older people have the gift of knowing that their time is limited. This realization – *which younger people may also have if they have had a near death experience like Carstensen did when she was in her 20s* – gives them a whole different perspective. And, Carstensen shared, this motivates them to become better listeners. I immediately recalled my conversation with Scott.

[pause]

**Screen: [pic of sower, sowing seed]**

In today's gospel, Jesus tells the familiar parable of the sower and the seed: ***A sower was sowing seed and some seed of the seed fell on the path and birds ate it; some of the seed fell on rocky ground where it could not take root and was therefore burned away by the sun; some of the seed fell among thorns and was choked by the thorns growing around***

***it. But, some of the seed fell on rich soil, “and produced fruit, a hundred or sixty or thirtyfold.”***

**Screen: “*Whoever has ears ought to hear.*”**

Jesus ended the parable by challenging his listeners:

***“Whoever has ears ought to hear.”***

Today’s Gospel is about receptivity. How receptive are we to hear God’s word and to let it take root and grow in our lives? In a commentary on today’s gospel biblical scholar Dianne Bergant talked about the challenge of that phrase - ***“Whoever has ears ought to hear.”*** The challenge, she says, for us is to look inside ourselves to see how well we hear all that God may be trying to tell us. Bergant adds that we may be very receptive to listening when God seems to be pointing out something we agree with, but the challenge is whether we are equally open when God is saying things to us that might stretch or challenge us. Bergant also makes the point that regardless of whether the statements comfort us or challenge us we should realize that they can come

to us from both likely and unlikely sowers of his seed. His Word might come to us from a religious leader like Fr. Mike, or they might come to us from just an ordinary member of the community - a young person, an elder, a friend, a stranger, or even someone we don't particularly like.

**Screen: [pic of hands in soil]**

In any case, we are the soil to which God refers in today's Gospel, in which God sows his word. He spreads his word here at church – in the readings, the Gospel and (hopefully) our homilies. God also spreads his word in our small groups and through our interactions with Catholic and Christian friends. But, at other times he spreads his Word through less likely sources – maybe even old friends we may have not seen or spoken to in many years. *When he does speak to us through these unlikely sources are we open to listen to and hear him?* Talking with my friend Scott made me realize how much I don't actually listen to or hear many of the people in my life, especially the people who come in

and out of it quickly. Today's gospel made me realize that the people to whom I am not listening may be trying to tell me something that God wants and needs me to hear. For me Scott was an unlikely person to lead me to this realization. How about you? Which type of soil from today's gospel are you? Are you receptive to hear God speaking to you, perhaps through unlikely sources? Are your ears and heart open to listen to him speak through others?

**Screen: [pic of cover of book "Kitchen Table Wisdom"]**

In a chapter titled "Just Listen" from her book, *Kitchen Table Wisdom*, author Rachel Naomi Remen writes,

I suspect that the most basic and powerful way to connect to another person is to listen. Just listen. Perhaps the most important thing we ever give each other is our attention. And especially if it's given from the heart. When people are talking there's no need to do anything but receive them. Just take them in. Listen to what they're saying. Care about it. Most times caring about it is even more important than understanding it."

Remen is one of my favorite authors. For several months (a few years ago) I read a chapter from one of her books each

morning as part of my prayer routine (until I exhausted all the chapters). They are usually very short and offer such great nuggets of faith and wisdom.

In the introduction of *Kitchen Table Wisdom*, Remen says the following:

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“When I was a child, people sat around kitchen tables and told their stories. We don’t do that so much anymore. Sitting around the table telling stories is not just a way of passing time. It is the way wisdom gets passed along. The stuff that helps us to live a life worth remembering. Despite the awesome powers of technology many of us still do not live very well. We may need to listen to each other’s stories once again.”

**Screen: [pic of my family around my grandmother’s kitchen table]**

This quote reminded me of the times we would sit around my grandmother’s actual kitchen table when I was growing up – talking, but mostly just listening. (The pictures on the screen are actually pictures of my family sitting around my grandmother’s kitchen table.) Sitting around her table, talking and listening, was a weekly and sometimes daily occurrence. Remen’s quote and



today's gospel made me realize that this is really where I learned about God, faith, love, how to be a good person and how to live a good life. I suspect that this may also be where the seeds of my vocation to the diaconate were planted. I truly believe that God was speaking through my grandparents, aunts, uncles and extended family literally at my Grandmother's kitchen table.

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In today's Gospel, Jesus ends the Parable of the Sower with the words, ***"Whoever has words ought to hear."*** Hearing and truly listening to God speak in the readings and homilies here at church, and hearing and truly listening to God speak through each other in our small groups is a big part of what Jesus challenges us to do. But, this week I would like to challenge you to have an intentional conversation with someone else who comes into your life, maybe someone unexpected. It might be someone you know but have never stopped to talk with or someone you have lost touch with and can now find an opportunity to reconnect with. Maybe invite them to sit down at your "kitchen table," actually or

metaphorically. You might want to reachout to someone you haven't seen for a while – *maybe someone you lost touch with during the pandemic* – and invite them to meet you for coffee, “just to catch-up.” Or, maybe just hang around an extra few minutes talking with co-workers over Zoom or Teams after a meeting. I actually did this a couple times this week after drafting this homily. At the end of the meeting I simply asked my colleague to remind me where they live. I then asked them how their day or week has been going and we talked about family and some of the joys and challenges we have experienced this summer. **[pause]** However you create this “Kitchen table” conversation, the important thing is that you truly hear and listen to what the other person has to say. If you can, pose a question to them like, “*What is most important to you and why?*” or “*What really gives your life meaning?*” and then, just listen...

This week let us heed Jesus's Words from today's gospel and take time to listen to and hear what other people are saying to us. Sit down with friends, family, parishioners and especially

those unexpected people who come into your life. Listen to what they have to say to us, what God may be speaking to you through them. Then let us share God's word with people in our lives.