**Lectio Divina #1: Listening for the Word of Life**

**1 John 1:1-4 Tim Dickau December 17, 2017**

**Why Lectio Divina?**

During the season of Advent, we practice Lectio Divina. Many of you are veterans of lectio divina because we have been doing this for I think 10 years during Advent. For those who are new, what is Lectio Divina and why do we practice it every Advent? Here are a couple reasons:

1. First, we want to learn to listen to scripture carefully. Often in worship for example, we listen through the voice of the one opening the text. That’s good. During lectio divina, we listen in a different way, first through our thoughts, intuitions, images, as we meditate upon the scriptures together.

Literature scholar Roger Lundin, in one of the last books he wrote before his recent and sudden death, suggests that we have a hard time hearing God’s voice today. One reason is that before the printing press, we used to listen to texts rather than read them. Now 400 years later and after the advent of computers, we are constantly reading, writing, managing information, but seldom are we listening to words read to us, and we certainly don’t listen meditatively. And so, Lundin argues, we get out of the listening practice and have a hard time listening to the quiet, whisper of the Spirit as ESSG called us to do last week. Listening to scripture attentively, slowly, opens up the possibility of hearing God’s voice again. Something that is extra hard in this season when we are inundated with a cacophony of advertisements and sentimental voices.

2. Secondly, we listen not only to scripture but to one another, since we believe that God speaks through the whole community as well as individuals. Lectio Divina is based on the truth that God speaks to us *through* one another, including the person you might least expect to speak to you. So, you yourself may not be accustomed to speaking publicly in our worship but be ready. Because God may have something for our community to hear through you.

**1 John 1:1-4**

’Before we do the lectio, I want to say a few words about this introduction to John’s letter that we are going to listen to. Two weeks ago, we read the intro to John’s gospel. The intro to this letter has some similar themes. There are various things I could say to introduce this text but I thought I would focus on the challenges that these words presented to the first hearers, both Jews and Gentiles – people of other cultures.

There are three themes John introduces here that he will develop in this letter – each one has a sharp edge of challenge:

1. Jesus is the Word of Life made flesh.
2. Jesus is the eternal life – the Christ who brings in the new age
3. Jesus is wholly light, entirely good.

How would these present a challenge to his listeners?

First, a note about the Word of Life. In Greek thought, the Word, logos, was not only about language, it referred to the organizing principle of life and the universe. As in the introduction to John’s gospel, here too in this letter, Jesus is named as the logos. The Word -- of Life. However, Jesus was not some abstract idea. He was a person, one who called for their allegiance. Jesus posed a challenge for Gentile folks who may have been tempted to slot Jesus into categories of Greek thought where anything to do with the gods was thought to be slightly removed from the created world, separate from flesh and blood.

To those folks, John says in no uncertain terms “we’ve heard him. We’ve seen him. We’ve touched him. This is not about those far off gods or “irrelevant religion”; this is someone to take seriously in history, in the real world of flesh and blood. This deep longing for a right ordering to life and the universe, for logos, has found its fulfillment in a person: Jesus: the Word of Life. The Word of life called them to respond. Jesus came as a challenge to Gentiles.

Jesus also presented a challenge to the Jewish story. Not only was the Word – a typical way of speaking of God’s action in the Old Testament –identified with Jesus, but this Word was the eternal life. That phrase “eternal life” has sometimes have translated or reduced to mean everlasting. But this phrase eternal life has a much bigger meaning in these letters and John’s gospel. Eternal life was John’s was of talking about the life of the new age that God had promised. Whereas the other gospel writers spoke of the kingdom of God or the Kingdom of Heaven, eternal life was the code word in the writings of John for this promised future. By calling Jesus the eternal life, John was saying that in Jesus the promised future had arrived. Jesus was the Christ, the Jewish Messiah who has shifted history, overcome the darkness and planted God’s seeds of new life through his death and resurrection. The old Jewish complaints about God not showing up didn’t hold water anymore. God has acted decisively for their liberation – and on their behalf for the whole world. Jesus presented a challenge to the Jews.

And all this had implications for how they lived. Since God was fulfilling the Jewish story and even Greek cultural stories, God had proven to be entirely light, wholly good. As a result, John’s readers, Jews and Gentiles, were being summoned to bring their lives and their world into this light, to face up to the darkness within and around them. They couldn’t go on living in darkness if indeed the light has come. John will go on in the letter to describe some of these ethical implications. For example, he tells them that they too were called to lay down their lives for others, especially those in need. They were to live in and as the light.

I hope you are beginning to hear the sharp challenges this text presents to its first readers. So then I wonder: How does the text challenge us? How might it challenge our temptation relegate Jesus to “religion” and marginalize him instead of seeing him as the one has shifted history from within it? How does it challenge our temptation to ignore or dismiss God as inactive or disinterested, and to instead see Jesus as acting now to establish a renewed world, eternal life? How might this text challenge us to get off our fences and get in on this renewal, to live in the light?

**The Practice**

Okay, that is a little about the text and its challenges to the first readers. We are ready to practice the holy reading. . How does Lectio work? We listen to the story read multiple times interspersed with moments of silence. In the first two readings, you are invited to listen for a word or phrase. In the next two readings, you will listen for an image, a story, a memory, an emotion. How does this passage connect with you? What does it evoke? And then finally, the last two times we hear the text, we listen for God's invitation to us corporately, or to you personally.

Let's pray first. God, we come ready to listen. Speak to us. Speak to us in ways we need to hear. We are ready to hear you.

Let us now listen together for a word or phrase in the reading that strikes you and that you are drawn to. Focus on that one word or phrase. Sit with it in the silence.

Let's hear from some of you: what is the word or phrase that stood out for you.

The second guiding question is to listen for an image, an emotion or story connection to that word that you were drawn to in the first readings. We will hear the scripture twice again, we will have a longer time of silence (3 minutes). Reflect on that word or phrase, begin to wonder about that word and listen for image, emotion, or story that this word draws you into... (close eyes).

Share with a person or two next to you. Allow their responses to lead you further.

Now we will hear this scripture two last times. After this there will be about 5 minutes of silence. In this silence, ask God this question – God, what is your invitation to me? To us as a community? To our world? What response are you inviting us to this day, or this week? Then we will have a time of sharing with one another.

Invite some of you to share. Let's all listen for the common threads if any in these invitation.

Hold your word. Hold your invitation. It is important that you take your word with you into the day and the next week. Chew on it, sit with it, let it take hold of your imagination, dialog with God about it. Ask God to reveal more about this specific word given to you. Allow it to bring you deeper and closer to God.

Jesus has brought new life

Communion

As you come, we invite you to light a candle for a place or situation or person for whom God seems absent, a place, situation or person you long for God's kingdom to come into. Children who light a candle should be accompanied by an adult. If bring your children, indicate whether a blessing or communion.

The Incarnation of the Word of Life

**1**That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. **2**The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. **3**We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. **4**We write this to make our[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20John%201#fen-NIV-30545a)] joy complete.

Light and Darkness, Sin and Forgiveness

**5**This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.