

**No 3: Listening to the Risen Christ**

*Risen Christ, faithful shepherd of your father's sheep  
Teach us to hear your voice  
And to follow your command  
That all your people may be gathered into one flock.*

If I speak for ten minutes and you listen, how far will this help you in the long run to listen to the risen Christ? Suppose instead I give you the space in this sermon to experience the silence that is a necessary part of such listening, whilst giving a few pointers along the way? As with the other sermons in this series, the text will be available if you want to revisit this morning's experience. There will be four phases

So I invite you to make yourself comfortable and to close your eyes if you want. Relish the opportunity of being still, in company—the nature of the place and time preventing you easily from opting out - a loving framework of compulsion.

If possible, surrender the unbelief you have to the greater whole—acknowledge what doubts you have about the value of prayer, as St Thomas acknowledged his lack of belief in the upper room with the other disciples. Sit for a moment and weigh your belief and unbelief. **Now, tell the risen Christ the truth, and listen**

*Pause*

The second phase. We have just spent a few days in the dales at lambing time. The image of adult sheep with one, two or three lambs is strong in my visual memory. The older sheep move slowly—the newly born have the capacity to have all four feet off the ground simultaneously. Where are you on the spectrum of stillness and energy as you try to listen? Is every fibre of your body screaming for this to stop—so you can do something. . **Tell the risen Christ the truth, and then listen**

*Pause*

The third phase is to consider whether your listening is dependent on your primary / basic needs? Are you in other words desperate to hear, like a sheep desperate for food/stuck in the fence? Is your listening driven by fear of the future, a desire to do the right thing in difficult circumstances, the anxiety that your being left out of something that's important, the need for consolation? If things are going smoothly, listening may be the last thing on your mind. **Tell the risen Christ the truth, and then listen**

*Pause*

(The Pulley\* by George Herbert, reflects on how easy it would be for us to ignore God if life were easy and smooth)

The final phase. How much reality can you bear? *Do you choose to watch Midsummer Murders or Panarama?* Listening to the Risen Christ presupposes a willingness to hear what is being said. Are you capable of responding to what you might hear said to you? In this last phase we must sit very light to the imagery of sheep. The Risen Christ does not require docility and does not want you to spend the whole time shut up safe in the sheepfold. Might he be calling you to action? I don't need this morning to go into any detail about the outcome for two reasons: In the first place Jonathan gave a wonderful resume of possible actions in his sermon last week (available at all good bookstores). In the second, it is your listening that will make things clear, perhaps in conversation with others, and over time. **Tell the risen Christ the truth, and then listen—if you can.**

### Postscripts

My Christian life was sharpened by my being a member of a series of prayer groups when I was in my late twenties. I wonder if the Risen Christ has something to say to us as a Christian community about the need to develop our corporate listening?

The presence of children in church brings an inevitable tension to our listening; in the same way the phone ringing can interrupt your silent prayer at home. We have to live with this tension, unless we isolate ourselves.

### The Pulley

WHEN God at first made man,  
Having a glasse of blessings standing by ;  
Let us (said he) poure on him all we can :  
Let the worlds riches, which dispersed lie,  
Contract into a span.

So strength first made a way ;  
Then beautie flow'd, then wisdome, honour, pleasure :  
When almost all was out, God made a stay,  
Perceiving that alone, of all his treasure,  
Rest in the bottome lay.

For if I should (said he)  
Bestow this jewell also on my creature,  
He would adore my gifts in stead of me,  
And rest in Nature, not the God of Nature :  
So both should losers be.

Yet let him keep the rest,  
But keep them with repining restlesnesse :  
Let him be rich and wearie, that at least,  
If goodnesse leade him not, yet wearinesse  
May tesse him to my breast.