Children’s Sermon: Psalm 54:2

I’d like to invite all of our children to come forward, come on up.

Welcome. At the first service there were only three. Everyone must be on vacation! So, I’m glad to see so many of you here today, thank you for coming up. Today, I want to talk about listening.

How many of you like to talk? Do you like to talk to friends a lot? How many of you like to listen to friends? Hmm, more of us like to talk than listen. That becomes a problem – doesn’t it? I’m talker, that’s why I’m up here, right? Well, there’s a Word of God that he shares with us about the importance of listening and I want you to hear that Word this morning because listening is an important thing, not only to our friends, but we need to listen for God’s direction in our life. And you think God’s direction; well, sometimes God speaks to us when we’re quiet enough, “I should help someone or I should do something, and I should love God with my whole heart.” So, listen to these words, please.

Psalm 54:2: “Listen, God—I’m desperate. Don’t be too busy to hear me.

In other words, someone wanted to talk to God, the Psalmist who wrote this, and they were worried that God was too busy. There are times in our life when we adults get busy. And you say Mom or Dad or teacher and we’re so busy cooking or cleaning or doing some task and you want to talk and we don’t listen. Does that ever happen to you? It does to me sometimes. It happens to all of us. It even happens to folks out there. Sometimes we get so busy and people want to talk to us but we’re really aren’t intent on listening to what’s going on. And sometimes if we’re desperate, like if I really need to find help, or I need help with my homework, or my foot is stuck under a carpet or a
chair or something I ask, “Please listen, I need help, I’m desperate here.”

Learning to talk at times and then learning when to be silent is an important part of our life. There are places that we go and we just can’t talk out all the time. Actually church is one of those places, we usually sit here fairly silent, other than joining in prayers and singing and a few things like this. And so you might hear someone say to you every once in a while, “Zip it!” Has anyone ever said that to you? I bet I can beat you! My Bishop told me to “Zip it!” the other year – how about that! (laughs) …because I was talking too much. There are times if we are talking we can’t hear what other people have to say. And a lot of times, what other people have to say is a very important thing. We need to have our ears very keen at what we can hear. Sometimes we don’t even hear the noise around us because we’re so accustomed to it. How many of you live near trees and woods and gardens? Some of you have those things around you? How many of you ever hear this thing? Do you know what a cricket is? Do you hear them at night? Sometimes we get so busy with all the music and all the TV and all the games, screens, and singing and shouting and playing that we don’t even hear the things that God gave us that we can enjoy.

When I go to the mountains sometimes I go to the stream and sometimes at the pond or the stream there are bullfrogs and you hear them at night.

Sometimes some of the critters of the world need to be very attentive to find their own. Sea lions come up on the beaches and sometimes by the hundreds or thousands and they have to find their little ones in that crowd. Now you can imagine if you are a little baby sea lion and you needed to find your little mom and dad, they all sort of look alike, right? And they probably all sound alike from our perspective and sometimes they even get covered with sand that probably makes them more difficult to find. But when they bark out their sound the mothers and fathers listen so well they can find their babies and they are happy as can be when the whole family is back together again.
Sometimes we like to talk after we’ve had a good experience. Some of you have done some fun things like going to the ocean, beach, parks, camping, fishing – I don’t know what else you did, but after you take a fabulous ride, don’t you want to tell someone all about it?

And sometimes if your team or activity at school wins a trophy, you want to go home and tell everybody?

And then there’s sometimes when we didn’t get the trophy – then do you want to talk to somebody? Sometimes we just want someone to listen to us, because we realize, “I should have caught the ball,” or “I could have sung better…” or “I didn’t dance as good as I could have…” and we get really sad and we still want someone to listen more than to talk. Sometimes when we are really down we want to talk.

These are two different gifts we have. Sometimes it’s a gift of listening to other people. Sometimes it’s a gift of sharing by speaking to other people because it makes them feel happy to hear your good news. Like when we have a birthday party, everyone isn’t quiet are they? We sing and we celebrate and we have a big party!

And sometimes when the party cake wasn’t so good, we listen to each other.

Sometimes when we are sick, we want someone near us.
Sometimes when we are playing a game we want them to talk to us.

If you’re in school and you don’t listen, how would you do in your subjects? Probably not so good, right? You have to listen to what the teacher is telling you. And there are times when you are parents are saying, like if you’re going on vacation, “I need you to get your suitcase, I need you to put in your clothes, your toys, games and all those things. And if we don’t listen, we miss important things in life.

Sometimes things are so important to listen to that we want to block out everything else. Listening can be a real gift. And it opens our heart to listen to other people. Some of them are having tough times and some of them are having exciting times.

When I was young my sisters would pick on me, did that ever happen to you? I bet it did to somebody out there. Sometimes they wanted to tell me something I had to do and I would say, “No, no, no, no – I can’t hear you (plugging his fingers in his ears)” did you ever do that? Because they wanted me to jobs and chores and tasks that’s not very good listening, is it? When someone is directing you, you need to be very attentive; you need to listen, to learn.

Sometimes parents have serious talks to children. What do you think of this talk, is this a serious talk do you think? Have you seen that finger? You’ve all seen it! Uh-huh. It means, “listen – this is very important.” It’s not always scolding, it is “this is very important and you don’t want to miss it, okay?”

Then sometimes we take times to pray, and we want to be very quiet so that God can just pour God’s self out for us. Sometimes when we listen we feel like we’re floating, it’s like we are filled with joy.
Sometimes it’s like when we are walking on a pathway in the woods, you can hear every little noise around you. You want to listen for deer, birds, or you see butterflies.

Only when we take time, even if we are at the ocean, instead of making a lot of noise all the time. If we are quiet we can hear when waves make noise, right? We can hear them lapping on to the beach and it’s a beautiful thing. Well a part of the beauty of relationships is friendships and sometimes friendship’s take time to talk to one another, and sometimes friendship’s take time to listen to one another. When I was in Africa this spring, I was able to get some bracelets that are like friendship bracelets. And I want you to come up and get one and then you are dismissed. And you are able to go back home to remember some friend you are with to take time to listen to, and speak to them and share your joys and also share things you are happy about and when you are having a tough time and you need to talk to someone you can do that too.

Message:

Luke 10:38-42

Practicing hospitality is something that the church has done through the ages and it’s something that we can never stop learning about. How can we be better at welcoming people into our lives, to make them feel at home? Every one of us here has been some place traveled somewhere, entered a new home or place, where we felt out of place. And you want to be welcomed and you want to know where there are things are that you feel – I guess the words I like to use is – I feel right at home. That people around me are helpful, that if I needed something, I know I would be cared for. And that’s a part of the lesson today from two people; you’ve probably heard these stories before. Sometimes Mary and Martha – the story is told to beat up on one or the other. Either the one who was always serving and working, or the other, who apparently to some seemed lazy because they were doers, Mary, would take the time to sit at the feet of Jesus and do nothing but listen. And I’m not here to condemn or to lift one higher than the other but to say that we all have different gifts. And these gifts of Hospitality are both needed to make it come together. We can welcome one another, so when other people come to this family called Calvary say, “I feel
right at home.” “People are caring for me.” As they become part of that, they will also be that caring person to reach out to other people. Hear this lesson today from Luke, 10.—As they continued their travel, Jesus entered a village. A woman by the name of Martha welcomed him and made him feel quite at home. She had a sister, Mary, who sat before Jesus, hanging on every word he said. But Martha was pulled away by all she had to do in the kitchen. Later, she stepped in and interrupted them, “Master, don’t you care that my sister has abandoned the kitchen to me? Tell her to lend me a hand.” The Master said, “Martha, dear Martha, you’re fussing far too much and getting yourself worked up over nothing. One thing only is essential and Mary has chosen it. It’s the main course – and it won’t be taken from her.”

“The main course.” Jesus had different ways of meeting different people. There were times when they were out in the desert and he would have come in, and I bet he would have wanted Martha a lot more than he would have wanted Mary, to bring him some water, some food, some nourishment and to allow him to clean up and to rest. But on this particular journey, after working in healing and performing miracles, he probably needed to ‘download’ or empty himself of some of the burdens that he was carrying. He may have needed someone to listen to him. Have you ever had that moment? Of course. There are moments when we are so excited, we come home and we want to tell someone, “the boss called me in today and I wondered if I was in trouble and I found out that I received a raise!” Well, it hasn’t happened lately, but we hope for those things – right!? And when that happens, you want someone in your family, spouse, partner, friend, to listen to your excitement, your joy, your enthusiasm. Other times, you come home from the doctors, and he had news you didn’t’ want to hear. And you really need someone to listen. That you can bear your heart and your soul. Something drastic is going to change in your life. There are other times when we come, I remember working in my Pap’s field as a farmer, and as much as I always wanted to see my grandmother and had stories to tell her, “Gram, is there something to eat?” when you work all day, you’re not so worried about being listened to. You want your physical body built up. And there are times when you do the dirtiest dustiest jobs, like that guy on TV from Dirty Jobs, where more than anything you just want to clean up and just be present. “I just want to be. I am not worried about the food, or trying to listen, I just need for
someone to let me be.” Have you ever been there? Not bothered by anything, just give you your space.

A few weeks ago, I attended a seminar and these seminars nowadays are held in hotels. First thing, someone is opening the door for me. Inside, someone was there to hand me a beverage; someone else gave a hot towel to wipe my hand and brow. And I’m thinking, “this is really service!” We would kind of like service like that. When we go on vacations, we expect when we pay for it. And we say, “Isn’t that nice?” but I paid $300 for the seminar and forgot that I paid for some of that service, right? And as Christians, we’re to offer that – freely. When Jesus and the disciples were walking, one of the customs of that day because they were sandals, and they walked on long dusty roads, and they didn’t have buses or trains or trolleys or mass transit so they walked miles, and their feet would be hot from the burning sun and filthy from the dirt, even to this day if you travel in many of those lands, the people have a little teapot and the first thing they do is take off their sandals and rinse water over their feet to cool them and to clean and dry them as they enter your home. It was a way of providing refreshment, not eating refreshment. If you’ve ever had one of those days where you are totally exhausted from work, then you feel like a new person. We’re refreshed.

When we come into the family of God and talk about Hospitality, people who should come in should be able to leave here feeling refreshed. “My spirit is full, I have felt love, I have felt accepted, I have felt that I have been at home. People were caring for me, the way we are supposed to care for one another.” When you get into one of these high rent places and there is the bell there for you to ring for anything, I forgot my toothbrush, would you bring me one? You call asking for shaving cream, towel, something to drink. We expect service. Now, we pay for that service. When I was out there, I spoke to the Concierge, and he was telling me, “if you need anything, we have maps of the area; I’ll direct you where to go, if you need transportation, we’ll take care of it, we’ll lock up your bag if you need to leave early…” I mean down to any detail, if you needed it you could come see him and he would care for you.

If the world can do that, shouldn’t the people of God do it better? If
people come to us, and there’s something we can do to make them feel at home. Shouldn’t we be like the Mary and Martha, that if they need some action, something done physically, then we can do that? And if they need an ear to listen to them, we can do that. We can care. We can be present for them to do whatever. This person who is greeting and welcoming you into the family of God should say, “this place called Calvary is here to serve you.” Some church today thinks that we are here to serve them. But the body of Christ is here to serve others. And to serve one another. To care for our needs, to listen, to minister to one another. The welcome mat should always be open. Hospitality should be number one in our minds. If I were a stranger coming in here and you see someone and you’re in a group talking to your friends and you see them and they are lost and wandering around and you think, now if I was in a new place, maybe is should see if I can go over and I can help them. There are things we typically want, if I have children I might want to know if there is a place for my child to find Sunday school, are there restrooms?, is there a “Cry room,” are there other places and other things I can be a part of when I’m here? Practicing hospitality lets others who you do not know, know you. Then at least if they know no one else in this building, then you could say, “Hi, I’m Jeff,” and we always worry that when we do that that they might be a member for years that I don’t know, and I said some people have been members here longer than I have been alive! Seriously! So will I know every member? No. will I know every person’s name? “I’m just simply Jeff; I don’t believe we’ve met.” And then at least you’ll know one person you didn’t before. And you open your life to them, “would you like to sit with me today, could I take you to the fellowship hour?” If you want to know more about the Church, could I take you to whom-ever it is, someone in the children’s department, one of the pastors.

We want people to know like as Mary and Martha are wondering how can we take care of our brother, Jesus Christ, its’ not just that Martha was upset. I can imagine my family all out there cooking and cleaning and someone would say, “get your butt out there and help me in the kitchen!” they wouldn’t have been as easy as Martha asking Jesus to ask her. They would’ve just said, “Come and do it.” But Jesus said, you’re getting fussed up about a lot. Sometimes we fuss so much because we want to give the appearance that we’re altogether. I want a hands up from everybody who has it all together. If we were all to
take a bus around and no one could scoot home and clean up, could we walk into your house and you’re all-together, right? You know what; I’ve never been all together! But you’re all welcome to my house (not all at one time!) we need to get over this thing that we need to be perfect, that we need to have our life together. Because, the issues that we deal with in our life are the same issues that everyone else deals with. If you have children, everyone who has ever had a child will know that there will be things all over the place. And there’s dirt and grime, marks on the walls and everything else that goes with raising children. As it is if we’re working a regular job, you know you can’t keep up with everything all the time.

The chore is not so much to say come and help me do mine, but to say what does this person coming into our life today really need? What is the hospitality? How can I be aware? There might be times where we might be at the church and find someone in the sanctuary. And if they are kneeling at the altar, do you think they’re really hungry?

Or sitting in the chapel crying, they want an ear. They want someone that cares, that has a heart, that’s not judgmental, that’s not critical, that’s just simply – Zip it, and listen.

And then there might be something more after that. If someone comes into the church and asks about the food pantry, or if someone comes by and says I’ve been on the road for days, I haven’t eaten for a couple days, they probably don’t want your ear do they? They want something to eat.

Both women had different gifts, both are gifts from God. We all have different gifts, they are not better than one or the other, they are different.
And they are both needed to have hospitality. We need to be keen enough to understand the action – what is needed right now in this moment of time?

Is it a service of action, I need to take them to a place, they need a car, gas, a ride? Is it something that I need to be hospitable, I need to find a place for their children; I need to listen to them? We need to find our place in what it is. And the only way we can do that is to listen.

Because most of the world around us is so filled with activity. If you’ve ever gone to a city, this photo is from New York City Times Square, and you look around in the night time, you see all the lights, sign boards, the people –

It’s what many would call Overload. Have you ever been there? I share a very sad story about me.

I was taking a friend up to my family one time, she had nowhere to go over the Holidays, so riding from school in Lancaster, to my home was 2 hours. I had an audience, and I talked! This is this, and when I grew up, we did this… and she said, “could you be quiet?” (laughs) “

My mind is full, I can’t absorb anymore, I am on overload!” Have you ever been there? When I was in math and chemistry class, I always wanted to say, “Can I be excused, my mind is full. I can’t take any more of this today!” there comes a time when people don’t want to hear us ramble on, they want us to listen. They want us to listen because when we get to the point when we are so full of stuff that we can’t absorb, we can’t soak it up, we can’t drink it in, we can’t consume it anymore, we just want to be. One of the most difficult things
in our culture is trying to impress, not just trying to care for people, it’s an over-care. Sometimes people knock on your door and sometimes when I have the privilege to visit friends or family or even a new acquaintance. It is kind to offer someone a drink, kick your shoes off, put your feet up, or whatever it is, but sometimes it’s not all these things – it’s just, I want to be here with you, a place where I feel at home. I don’t need a thing.

Because sometimes the list is endless, no I just want to be with you. You are my friend, and you have some of those people and when you’re feeling down out and just by being with them you already feel two notches higher. You know it’s a safe place, that’s what it is to have hospitality. When people come to a safe place. And there are days where I want more than to just be here, where I need someone to reach out and care, but there are a lot of times where I just want to be there to regroup. So much has happened, I need to sit and think, “Where am I going now?” This happen when relationships change at work, when things in our families change, children move in or out, there’s a new birth. Whatever it is in life, some of the good things and some of the bad things make us have to take our life and regroup it.

To say, where am I going to go from here? We need that new focus and it’s not easy to focus if you don’t take time to slow down from our rapid pace and listen. Focus is very difficult. When people ask me why I go away sometimes, it’s because I can’t focus when I’m in my own house because if I’m at my house, I’m thinking I’ve gotta clean this, I’ve gotta fix that, I need to paint that. I’m so concerned about all the other stuff that needs done that I can’t focus on other stuff. I can’t be present. For me, I need a quiet place to regroup. We all have our quiet place. Some people it’s not quiet, it might be blaring music, but they can regroup there. Not right or wrong, we need to find out how we can regroup.

A man by the name Job had lost a lot, suffering greatly. His family, his wealth, all that he had. And his friends came over and they tried to tell him all of his problems before God and he told them, you know what – my life would have been better if you had all come over and just said nothing. There are times when our words aren’t all that helpful. When we have training for our Stephen Ministers, one of the greatest things
is to teach people that we don’t always have to say anything. Presence alone. When someone is in the Hospice program and they are passing, I’ve heard so many people say, even in my years even in my own family, say, “I can’t go visit with grandma, it’s too hard for me to see her that way, I don’t know what to say to so-and-so. I don’t want to go and say the wrong thing.” You know what, go and say nothing – just go. Sit beside the bed of someone who is passing or someone who is very ill, and you sit beside them and say nothing for two hours and you’ll brighten their day. Because when we ignore people, when we stay away, when we don’t welcome them into our space, into our life, it becomes a very lonely place to be. We are invited, it’s not what we say, it’s about being present. And we should know when we need to help. Mary knew this was a time to listen. Both for her own growth, but she also knew that Jesus probably needed someone.

There are times when we need to help and we know when that is. If you see someone outside in the cold, you know they need a blanket. If you see someone that’s hungry, you give them food. We just need to listen, not only with our ears, but be sensitive with all of our senses.

That we can know what God would have us do. We need to be able to acknowledge, recognize and observe and then ACT. Whatever we see, put it into action. We do need some of that down time to focus on it. And we need to realize that the bible tells us to be doers of the Word, not hearers only. And that means we need to Go.

And there are other times where we just need to, as the Psalmist says, listen to the “still small voice of God.” And the only way to listen to that is to be present in that moment. To be quiet, to be silent, that you might know what God would have you do.

Sometimes when we open our lives to other people we can find, as the scriptures say ‘Angels unaware,’
Hebrews 13: Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters. Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels unaware.

A friend of mine was traveling through India a few years ago, and when he was traveling through the airport he met someone, as you always do through shaking hands or greeting and the person said, “may I have your contact in India?” there are many cultures who just love to meet new people.

And one afternoon this person was there on a church mission, and he got a call, “Could I come and pick you up on my bike and take you to my home to introduce you to my family?” he said, “Sure.” Now I don’t think there were six people and a dog on that cycle, but he road across quite a few miles to get to that home and said that he got into their home and they sat him on a stool bench and gave him a platter of food. The family and neighbors sat around the little room watching him, they were proud to have a guest from America that would come to their humble home. That’s pretty amazing.

What has amazed me in recent years is that we have now moved on to wonderful homes, they’re bigger, they’re more equipped, and we do less invites. When I grew up we had two bedrooms and an attic made into one, we had one restroom. When the church had functions, like we do here, you would entertain an exchange student for a weekend or the youth for a weekend. We had Aunts and Uncles spend months with us, we had cousins and others who would stop by, and it was crammed with six or seven people in one restroom, but you did it. Now we have 3.5 and 4.5 restrooms and we can’t have anyone over because our house is a mess. A mess? There was a time when people took in their mothers and fathers and grandparents and others and they lived together. And I’m not saying we should all go back there but what I am saying is, hospitality is opening our lives to one another. Not worrying about our image; that we’re not ‘good enough.’ I have never been with anyone who wasn’t good enough. I have been in some very humble dwellings, and I have been in some very exclusive places in my life, and all the people are pretty much the same. We try to love, we try to
live, we try to care for one another. And so wherever we are, if we open our lives, not everybody is a home entertainer and I understand that, but can you at least open your life? Can you at least open your life and put it in a place where as you know, “you’re always welcome here.” That when you see this man, when they see you, people say, “go over to that person, they’ll do everything they can to help you.”

I’d like this church to be known for that. That no matter who they go to here, no one is going to say, “I don’t know – Bye.” You’ll see to it that the need is met. If you can’t meet it, you’ll talk them to a pastor, teacher or somewhere. That anyone who comes into this house called Calvary will say, “you are welcome here.” And that people will know that.

Hospitality is a ministry that we need. It is not so important how we welcome, just that we do. When people come and no one takes time to say hello, welcome or can I help you, we wonder if they will ever come again.

There are boundaries, borders of sorts that we have to cross, like you folks meeting the 8:30 people! Good Lord, some of those people are… well, we won’t go there. It’s folks from this side veering clear off the path from folks on this side. It’s learning about the differences. There are some people here that you would probably love to know if you had the chance to meet them. And if week by week you chose just to meet one new person, and not just say but sit down with them and find out something about them – you’ll be amazed. You might find connections and family and histories that you have in common, if you just open your life up to somebody else and welcome them in.

Jesus tells us a lot of things about welcoming, and here’s one: I was hungry, you fed me. I was thirsty, you gave me a drink. I was homeless, you gave me a room.
I was shivering and you gave me clothes. I was sick, you stopped to visit. I was in prison, and you came to me.

And again from Revelation, he talks about having your door open. Listen, I am standing at the door and knocking. If you hear my voice, and open the door, I will come to you and eat with you and you will be with me.

Jesus knew what it was like to enter people’s homes and he knew what it was like to make other people welcome. The people who were unacceptable – the lepers, the blind, the deaf, the lame, the hungry. He would not expect any less from us.

For I was a stranger, and you welcomed me in.

There’s a lot of us and we’ve been here for years but we’re still strangers. We don’t know one another. It takes a little effort, instead of running right out to whatever it is we have to run to all the time, it takes a five or ten minute time. Or ask if you can meet for breakfast. Or if you see them out somewhere, ask if you could join them. There would be times that we have other family times where you don’t necessarily have that time. But, we as the Body of Christ need be on fire with our welcome. It needs to be a warm, cozy place. And I hope we will all do all we can to make that happen. It is difficult, I know that. Because, most of us have a shy ingredient and we don’t want to step places we don’t belong. But, pray about it. If it’s done in love, god will use your gifts. God will multiply your friendliness and your welcome that others around you will know that this place and your heart is a place where they are always welcome.

Let us pray, Almighty and everlasting Father, we thank you , we praise you that you have taught us that your Son Jesus Christ, what it is to welcome everybody with open arms. There are no outcasts, and so teach us O Lord, to open our lives, open our hearts, that we might
make our life and this congregation and this community a welcoming place, filled with your love that’s overflowing. We ask in thy Son’s holy name, Amen.

**Benediction:**

One of the greatest photos that was ever given to me was “the Heavenly Banquet table” and if you’ve ever seen it, its’ real big and it goes on to eternity, I just love it. And with that one I also think of Jesus with his arms open wide, saying “Come in, not only to the banquet table but to life. You’re welcome here, in the heart of Jesus Christ. You’re welcome here at Calvary. Let us go forth, welcoming others into our lives. In the name of the Father, Son and Spirit, we are empowered to do so. Go in His name, Amen.