

From Pastor Marissa Becklin

The Word Read Aloud

While I love to read, I was never much of an audiobook fan. I found that when I heard the words rather than read them off the page, my mind was more likely to wander—soon I would catch myself thinking about something entirely different than the book I was listening to, and having to go back to re-listen to an entire chapter. Worse yet, audiobooks relaxed me, and made it more likely for me to take an accidental nap while listening.

All of this was true until the beginning of the pandemic in those particularly difficult days of March 2020. Suddenly I found myself unable to focus on reading from the page because my mind was swirling with the news of the world. Feeling disconnected from this major hobby of my life, I tried audiobooks again, this time taking a more intentional approach. I would focus on the words being said, closing my eyes if necessary, to take in the picture being painted for me. I would sit in a manner that kept me alert, so as not to fall asleep.

This entirely changed my experience of audiobooks—suddenly I found that listening to a story completely changed how I experienced it. This quote from a favorite book that I read this year summarizes it well: “I’ve never listened to an audiobook before, and I have to say it’s a totally different experience. When you read a book, the story definitely takes place in your head. When you listen, it seems to happen in a little cloud all around it, like a fuzzy knit cap pulled down over your eyes.” —Robin Sloan, *Mr. Penumbra’s 24-Hour Bookstore*

This experience of hearing the word spoken aloud makes me think of how early Christian communities experienced the scriptures. Before the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were written down, they were passed down through generations by being spoken aloud. Even after they were written, most people in the ancient world were not literate, so there were designated people in each community who would share the word with others. I imagine a gathering of young and old people from all different walks of life sitting together around a fire after nightfall, telling the stories of Jesus and the faith. People would have sat in hushed quiet, hearing the change in voice of the storytellers as they recounted the news of God’s love over the course of time. Through this telling the story would become a picture painted in the mind of the faithful, and with repetition, the story would be memorized by all the listeners. From there the chain of storytelling would continue—listeners become sharers, on and on down the line, until it reaches us, today.

When we gather for worship we hear the Word of God spoken aloud, but we are often distracted by a number of things: the grumbling of our stomachs, the coughing of our neighbor, the microphone volume, how comfortable we are in our seats. What if, when we approached the experience of hearing the Word of God, we did so with renewed purpose? What if we closed our eyes, focused on each word, and let the stories wash over us? What if we imagined ourselves alongside our ancestors in faith, hearing this story anew, letting it sink into our hearts so that we might become its sharers? What if, in our devotional life at home, we read the Word of God out loud to ourselves, rather than in our heads (or rather than not at all)?

The Word of God is a gift passed down to us from God via our ancestors. It has been entrusted to us as a gift to be shared, as a gift to be experienced. I pray that as you grow in faith this month, you find new and life giving ways to connect with this gift.

*In God’s peace,
Pastor Marissa*