

Discernment: The Practice of Listening

We hear or read the word "discernment" a lot lately. Discernment is used not only in the religious world but also in the secular world when it comes to decision making. In section 162:2c in the Doctrine and Covenants we read: "As a prophetic people you are called, under the direction of the spiritual authorities and with the common consent of the people, to discern the divine will for your own time and in the places where you serve." Section 163:1 states that: "'Community of Christ,' your name, given as a divine blessing, is your identity and calling. If you will discern and embrace its full meaning, you will not only discover your future, you will become a blessing to the whole creation. Do not be afraid to go where it beckons you to go." To comprehend, to embrace or live out, the full meaning of the name Community of Christ, and to couple that with discerning "the divine will for your own time and in the places where you serve" will take an intentional and concerted effort on our part. It may challenge us to rearrange our priorities, to participate in study, prayer and holy listening.

One of the major components of discernment is listening as described in the Doctrine and Covenants section 162:1b: "Listen to the Voice that echoes across the eons of time and yet speaks anew in this moment." In order to listen we must take time out to be quiet. And in the quiet we are challenged to know or discern which interior voice is the Voice of the Divine; for there are a many voices that go on inside of us. There is the voice of distraction that tells us we need to answer our cell phone whenever it rings or vibrates. There is the voice of distraction that encourages us to read an e-mail the moment it arrives and answer it, or be on Facebook, or Twitter, or text message a friend. We have an impulse that doesn't want us to miss the next episode of a TV program. We are kind of an anxious people with our electronic devices all demanding our attention. And yet, the Psalmist writes "Be still and know that I am God." In order to "Be still" we need to set those distractions to one side and sit in the quiet, calming ourselves from our gadget anxieties and sit with God. Oh, how difficult this is for so many.

The other voices that may be heard in our heads are the voices of self-doubt, poor self-esteem, anger, judgment and cynicism. These voices may be heard because we haven't internalized the fact that God loves us unconditionally and that God desires to commune with us daily, even hourly if

we will give God the time. Perhaps these voices would be softer if we practiced forgiveness, participated in reconciliation, increased our patience and tolerance of others and were not quick to judge. In the song "You Raise Me Up" the words speak to being present with the Divine: *When I am down, and O my soul is weary, when trouble comes and my heart burdened be. And I am still and wait here in the silence until you come and sit a while with me.* Each day we are given an opportunity to sit quietly with God and be in His presence, to speak and to listen, to share and be affirmed, to lift up concerns and be comforted. This is where the listening part of discernment begins.

"Scripture, prophetic guidance, knowledge, and discernment in the faith community must walk hand in hand to reveal the true will of God. Follow this pathway, which is the way of the Living Christ, and you will discover more than sufficient light for the journey ahead." (Doctrine and Covenants 163:7d)

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