

[BLANK] Listen. What do you hear? [PAUSE] Did you hear anything that you wouldn't hear otherwise? Did you hear a booming voice coming out of the clouds, a rolling like thunder, a whisper from the heavens? Maybe you did. Probably, though, you didn't. But you did see some things. You saw the light coming in through our beautiful stained glass windows, the lovely pipe organ, the people around you, maybe even the preacher up front. We tend to think that seeing is believing, and so, when we worship, we surround ourselves with things that help us to believe through seeing. But maybe seeing isn't always what we think it is. Maybe, believing is seeing, and listening, in ways that we had never expected to be seeing, and believing. Would you pray with me, please.

[PRAYER]

[JESUS WINDOWS] It is a joy to worship in this place, in such a beautiful space. When I come in during the week, I love being surrounded by images of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, as I pray for you, for my ministries here, and for God's world. The pictures of Jesus in this place remind me of how much God wants to reach out to us, and to give us answers to our deepest questions and longings. When we say that God is alive, Jesus Christ is our blessed assurance from God that God is alive, that God has walked among us, and spoken to us, healed us, and that God died for us, and rose from the dead for us. And God continues to speak to us, through God's Holy Spirit, and through the magnificence of God's creation. And that's the real reason that I love this place. Not only do I see God in this place; my heart can hear God in this place. [BLANK]

Even with all of this help from God, it's not always easy for us to see God's will for us, is it? We "get" that God watches over the big picture of life, and of all of creation, and that Jesus loves us. But do we really see it? Why can't God help us to see the way forward better, when we really pray for it? We know that God is always speaking to us. We know that God is always trying to answer us. But why is it so hard for us to see what God wants us to do?

I took a day off, recently, and went to watch the movie "First Man" at a theatre. [ARMSTRONG] "First Man" tells the story of Neil Armstrong, the first person to set foot on the moon, back in July of 1969. This movie is very different from many movies about space travel. The movie focuses mostly on how Armstrong had to overcome great losses and great defeats to become that first man on the moon. He and his wife Janet lost their daughter Karen to brain cancer when she was very young. This tragic loss came as Neil was struggling as a test pilot for the X-15, a rocket plane that could fly close to the edge of space. Defeat and loss were all around him on the way to the moon. His good friends died in a test of the Apollo 1 spacecraft, while it was on the rocket launchpad. He lost control of his Gemini 8 spacecraft after it docked with a rocket in earth orbit. He almost died when he crashed in a test of moon landings in the American desert.

[ON MOON] In spite of these tragedies, and failures, this very quiet man was told one day that he would be the first man on the moon. And by God's grace, he was. Did God make Neil Armstrong aware that this would be possible when his daughter Karen died? Did God reveal to him that he would rise above his many obstacles and setbacks, to

be the first person to set foot on the Moon? Not as far as we know. Sometimes we don't see God's will in God's answers to our prayers. But it seems that God did have a question for Neil Armstrong to answer: "Are you willing to keep trusting in me to find the answers?" Sometimes, listening to God's questions for us, when we are ready to hear them, might be the answer to understanding God's will for us, when we are not yet ready to hear or to see God's answers. [BLANK]

We don't give listening much time these days. We expect to see answers instantly on a TV, computer, or phone screen, or from a computer voice that's ready to tell us what we want to know. When have you really listened lately, to anything, or anyone, much less God? When have you listened, not to hear what you want to hear, but just to listen? When have you listened to someone, just for the sake of listening, saying nothing, except, maybe, "Thank you?" When have you walked down a road, with no distractions, and listened to what the world sounds like? We can hear amazing answers to questions that we never thought to ask when we listen like this. Maybe we don't see God's will, because we have given up on listening for things that God wants us to hear. And maybe, just maybe, we don't want to listen for what God wants to say, because we're afraid of what God might say.

The story of our friend Job in the Hebrew Bible reaches a climax today. For many days, Job sat in ashes, dressed only in rough cloth, grieving the loss of his family, his wealth, and his health. His friends could offer Job no consolation, no answers to Job's questions for God. Job was talking, but not really listening for God. Job saw nothing, and assumed that God was not there to see. Then, finally, God spoke to Job. But when God spoke, Job was not ready at all for what God had to say to him.

You see, God spoke to Job, not to answer his questions, but to ask Job questions! The living God, the God who Job had such faith in, the God who Job longed to hear, spoke to Job, at last - not to let Job hear what he wanted to hear, but to help Job understand just who it was that Job wanted to hear from. [EARTH FORMING] "Where were you," God asks Job, "when I laid down the foundations of the earth?" [THUNDERSTORM] "Can you issue an order to the clouds so their abundant waters cover you?" [BLANK] God, creator of all things, including life itself, wanted Job to answer God's fundamental question to us: who are you, in relation to God? Are you someone who really wants to hear from God? Do you want God for God's sake? Or do you just want what you want from God?

Why is it so hard for us to see God's will for us sometimes? Maybe because we make it hard for us to hear God's questions for us about how we have put our will above God's will. Maybe, just maybe, we know that we will have to admit how little we have prepared to answer God's questions about our will. God wants us to see God's will. God wants us to see clearly God's loving will for us. But first, we need to be ready to listen to God's questions for us, ready to put aside the things that keep us from being in a right relationship to the God who wants to guide us, to care for us, to lead us forward in hope.

One day, Mark's gospel tells us, Jesus and his followers were passing through

the ancient city of Jericho, east of Jerusalem. [BARTIMAEUS] There was a blind man there named Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus. Bartimaeus could not see God, just as Job could not see God, as he waited. Like Job, Bartimaeus had lost everything except the coat on his back. Like Job, Bartimaeus wanted to see God's deliverance, but he could not. Bartimaeus could only listen, and wait. And then, suddenly, he heard the crowds following Jesus, calling out the name of Jesus, excited that Jesus had come to see them. He knew who Jesus was. He was the son of David, God's hope from Israel for all the world - even for him, a man who was considered hardly a man at all by anyone, much less Israel.

And from this place of complete humility, Bartimaeus threw off his coat, his last shred of dignity, and ran to Jesus, crying, "Have mercy on me!" Bartimaeus did what Job could not do. Humbly, Bartimaeus reached out to God, who he could not see, but who he trusted would hear his cry for mercy, not justification. For forgiveness and healing, not vindication. To be known by God, not to know what God knows. Bartimaeus waited for Jesus to respond. And Jesus, the Son of God, asked Bartimaeus a question: "What do you want me to do?" Bartimaeus answered Jesus, "Teacher, I want to see." Bartimaeus didn't want just his eyesight. He wanted to see the will of God in the flesh, Jesus Christ. And so, Jesus healed this blind man, who had prayed to God, heard God's call, and responded to God's question for him humbly, and, like a student listening to a loved and respected teacher, obediently. [BLANK]

We all would like to know God's will for us. We should all seek God's will for us. And the answers to our question of what God's will for us might be will come in response to God's questions to us. How much, God asks us, every day, do you want to walk with me every day, to see how my answers are taking shape? How much do you want to become part of my answers to prayers, for yourself, and others? How much, God asks, are you willing to say to the God of all, who you want answers from, "Thank you," for being in the story of God's answers? Talk to God. Listen to God's answers, humbly, again and again. And then, see what God is doing for you, and for all of God's world. Amen.