

MINISTER'S LETTER

My dearly departed mum gave me a lot of unasked-for advice. She reckoned that it was part of the job of being a mum. My job was to listen.

For me the most memorable bit of advice (repeated often) was to listen; not just "Listen to me", but "LISTEN". There's a lot of talk around", she would say, "and a lot of noise". "There is no shortage of talkers. There is an acute shortage of listeners".

This Lent I wondered what I should say to you, Maybe I should recommend that you give something up. Or maybe I should recommend that you confess your sins. Or maybe I should recommend that you make amends for the hurtful things you may have said or done. All of those things are good to do during Lent and are part of the Lenten season as it is traditionally understood and practiced. But I keep coming back to the discipline of listening.

Ours is a very wordy faith. We read "The Word" and follow "The Word". We talk about "the word of life" but forget that a very important part of this "wordy" faith of ours is a very basic skill we need to cultivate. This is the art of listening. It is not just listening in the way we do when we play music as background during some activity. I am talking about intentional listening: listening on purpose; listening with interest; listening with connection; listening with love; listening with compassion; listening with understanding. These, and other ways of intentionally directing our listening are very important. Listening of the sort I am talking about is not passive; it is active.

There is an art to listening; or a craft if you prefer. It requires skill. It needs practice, And that is partly (but not entirely) the reason why we go to church. We meet with (hopefully) like-minded people. And, if all goes well our minds meet as well and we learn from listening - there are many stories in the church. Some are in The Bible. Some are sitting next to you. With a bit of luck and a careful application of skill we may hear some of them and find, as a result, that we grow in the two-way traffic of ideas and stories about episodes in that great adventure we call life and in the day-to-day practice of our faith.

Karel Reus

