

Listen

Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

The followers of Jesus would have been used to hearing texts. In congregations, in small groups, in conversation, the Bible would be explored with rigour and regularity. However, in this time of grief and uncertainty, the followers of Jesus are offered the chance to truly listen for God's voice in their understanding of how these well-known passages relate to each other. For not only does the stranger interpret the texts, as the disciples would be used to doing together, the stranger weaves them into a pattern which reveals to them afresh everything they have been hoping for.

Many expected that the Messiah would be a warrior who would free God's people from tyranny. They expected a royal prince with status and power to match. Instead, they got a carpenter who spent his time among the poor and marginalised, preaching love and forgiveness before being killed by the very people he was supposed to defeat. No wonder the disciples were grieving!

Yet, as the stranger continues to talk with them, it becomes clear that all they have hoped for and been promised is contained already in the Word of God in Scripture; the presence of God among them, good news for the poor, salvation and liberation, rising from the dead, God returning to reign on earth. The challenge is hearing this message above the noise of everything else that's going on around them.

Listening for God's voice has never proved easy. The boy Samuel, lying awake, hearing himself being called by name, had to be taught how to respond (1 Samuel 3: 1-21). Even those experienced in the ways of God have to learn how to interpret what they hear. Elijah, the terrified prophet on the run from Jezebel's fury, sheltered in a cave on hearing earthquake, wind and fire before finding that God spoke in stillness (1 Kings 19:1-21).

A disciple listens

Sharon Matthews from the 'Fusion' project in Tonge Moor tells us how much the phrase 'follow me' has meant to her in her discipleship journey.

'When I heard that, in Mark's gospel, the first words that we hear Jesus speaking are: "Follow me," that got me thinking about the times when we need to go somewhere and we say: "I don't know exactly where I'm going or how to go there, so I could do with some direction from someone to help me." It made me start to think about my journey so far and what my interpretation of Jesus'



words: 'Follow me,' have meant. I thought about all the people God has put in my path who I followed when I didn't know which way to go, and even moments when I have been able to say to others: "Follow me."

'I started to do some voluntary work and met someone I hadn't seen for years who was looking for help. Some days later, we got talking about life and she spoke about what a difficult time she had been through, growing up suffering abuse and being moved between different foster placements. When I said to her: "You've been through so much, what gives you strength?" she said: "God."

'Tracy was attending church and asked me if I would like to go along with her, so I went, but found it wasn't really for me. Other friends came along and encouraged me to try different things, so I went to a range of churches with different worship styles, activities and feels, which my friends introduced to me, eventually settling on one in which I felt at home and able to grow as a disciple.

'In time, I started to get more involved in church life. I told a friend about it, and she did too!

'A church leader showed great faith in me and asked if I'd be interested in developing what has now become a thriving community hub called Fusion; it has allowed me to share God's love and presence with lots of others, some of whom now attend church and are part of a loving church family.

'God put people in my path when I was on my journey and didn't know where I was going. Those people said: "Come on, follow me," and, in turn, God has used me to say to others: "Follow me."

Something to ponder

'The most serious obstacle to a life of faith is inattention. Esther De Waal, in her book *Seeking God: The way of Saint Benedict*, says: 'We are not being truly attentive unless we are prepared to act on what we hear. If we hear and do nothing more about it, then the sounds have simply fallen on our ears and it is not apparent that we have actually heard them at all.'

Jesus addressed the companions' current preoccupations in the light of biblical promises. Their sorrow had to be put into the context of God's purposes. Can we therefore attend not only to our feelings but to how our personal circumstances or our societal need is being woven into God's redemptive intentions?

Prayer

Speak, Lord, for your children are listening,
not for what we want to hear, or think we should,
but for the eternal wisdom of your Word.
We know it won't be easy. We know it won't be comfortable,
but we also know that we need to hear it and respond to it.
We ask for the willingness and strength to do so.
Amen.

Suggested response

Consider your favourite piece of music. Why is it so important to you? Does it communicate an important message? Listen to it afresh. What might God be saying through it? Share it with friends and listen to each other's perspectives.