
HEART SPEAKS TO HEART

When people ask me, “What brought you here to Canada?” I always say, “I followed my heart.” It sounds simple, following your heart, but sometimes the simplest things are the hardest. In order to follow *my* heart, I needed to say ‘goodbye’ to some important things in Korea; my job, my friends, my family, daily life in the country of my birth. However, it didn’t take me long to realize that following my heart also means following God’s will, and accepting the joy and challenge of meeting new people and living a new life.

Perhaps, that’s what Henri Nouwen found when he was taking care of a young man, Adam, who was the most disabled person in the L’Arche community in Toronto. Henri was a respected professor in the divinity schools at Yale and Harvard, but he decided to follow his heart and went to live in a community where people with developmental disabilities and those with a calling to assist shared life together. In his book, “Finding My Way, Home”, he described some beautiful moments when he was bathing Adam.

As I lifted his body into the bathwater, made big waves to let the water run fast around his chest and neck, rubbed noses with him, and told him all sorts of stories about him and me, I knew that two friends were communicating far beyond the realm of thought or emotion. Deep speaks to deep, spirit speaks to spirit, and heart speaks to heart. I began to experience a mutuality of love not based on shared knowledge or shared feelings, but on shared humanity.

Adam, who could not move anything by himself and could not speak, spoke something through his heart, and Henri listened to Adam with his heart, because, as he said, heart speaks to heart. Perhaps this kind of communication is something that most of us have lost, but can reclaim.

Heart-to-heart communication is found in the story of the Good Samaritan. The road from Jerusalem to Jericho was notorious, because so many people were robbed and killed there. People knew exactly what Jesus was talking about when he told his story. There was once a man traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho. On the way he was attacked by robbers. They took his clothes, beat him up, and went off, leaving him half-dead. The victim desperately needed help. A priest and a Levite were passing by, saw him but avoided him. But a Samaritan, when he saw the traveler, was moved with pity, healed and took care of him.

I have read this story so many times in my life; I've even done plays based on this story. Actually this is one of my favorite stories in the Bible. I have to tell you that this is the first time that I could read this story from the perspective of the traveler. We don't know who the person was, but we do know that the person experienced something he did not want, something unexpected and something he has feared. There was nothing he could rely on, beaten and bleeding on the road, except people who had compassion for him. He was at risk, because he could only appeal to people's consciousness.

The traveler's problem could be worse in our own culture, because we don't know what's going on with people unless they speak up. Our culture says that it is your responsibility to speak up and let others know exactly what you want. And it is a speaker, not a listener, who has the key to ensure that communication happens. We have a saying, "The squeaky wheel gets the grease", meaning that the person who complains aloud is likely to receive the most help and sympathy. It seems okay, as long as you have a choice to speak freely.

But what if you don't have a choice? What if you cannot say what you really need to say? What if your fear keeps you from speaking up? What if you really need someone who can listen to you, and truly understands how you feel?

The traveler, who was half dead, could not say a thing. He could not ask people to help him. There might have been more than the two people who passed him, thinking that they were not responsible for the victim. But in Jesus' eyes, not only the robbers but also the whole community left him behind; he was hurt physically, emotionally and spiritually, and there was no help until he met a

person who could listen to his heart speaking, someone who was willing to risk his own well-being by stopping on the infamous road, someone who would spend time and money on his healing. The Samaritan was willing to suffer together with the traveler; that is the meaning of compassion: suffering together.

I wonder how the Samaritan could have compassion. Where did he learn such deep listening? I think he might have learned from his own suffering as one of the marginalized at that time. Samaritans were regarded by Jews as neither fully Gentile nor fully Jewish; they were not considered normal; they were not fully human in the eyes of the Israelites. Samaritans were shunned – isolated, and the Samaritan in this story was no exception. But his isolation did not become a wall; it opened a channel of deep communication which is beyond our words and thoughts.

In our own suffering, we are invited to communicate with others in such a deep way. Many of us think that the time of sharing concerns during the worship service is very important for our community to draw closer to God and to each other. We share our concerns in spoken words. But I'd like to remind you that we also share our concerns in unspoken words, and that it is our responsibility to listen to those unspoken words with our hearts. When we truly listen to each others' stories, we participate in the healing ministry of God who is always listening to our stories.

In the story of Cain and Abel in Genesis, we can see how God listens to unspoken words. God said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" Cain said, "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper? And God said "What have you done? Listen; your brother's blood is crying out to me from the ground!" God cannot help but suffer with those who suffer. And God invites us to listen to each other's stories with our compassionate hearts as God listens to you and me with an eternal, infinite, compassionate heart.