

Do you remember that old game of “Telephone”?

One person would start out with a statement...

and then whisper it to the next person and so on...

The statement would be passed like a secret...through a line of people.

**When it reached the last person in line that person would say it out loud
and compare it to the original version...**

oh my goodness....

it was pretty funny how different it was!

**I think the point was to impress upon the participants how we often
don't really hear what is being said to us,
for a whole host of reasons....**

**And that can be a huge problem when we are trying to settle a conflict
or come to an agreement when we disagree....**

**You know, we all have a different style for engaging the conflicts,
large and small, in our lives**

some like to approach a conflict in a dominating way:

“My way or the highway”

Some choose the passive approach, the silent treatment....

Some like to play the victim and

utilize their “poor me” card

Very few of us take the more direct,

perhaps mature even enlightened approach:

by communicating in a mutually respectful way.

**A way that involves both respectfully speaking one's own point of view AND
truly listening, to the other person's point of view.**

Now, in our reading today,

Jesus is talking about situations within the community of believers...not about international relationships or between nations...

He's trying to teach his followers how to be a community living inside the Reign of God in their lifetime.

He is trying to give them a healthy strategy for dealing with the very human issues of conflict and harm and injury...

He is trying to teach them that reconciliation is of primary importance for the health of the whole community...

He is trying to convey to them that they, as a community, can resolve their differences...

and they have a process within their means

that they can use without resorting to extreme legalism or violence....

So what is his method?....

He's says: talk to each other!

listen to one another...

go to the one who has hurt you,

work it out.

Yet we all know that we talking less and less to each other these days.

People are actually beginning and ending relationships

without ever actually meeting the other person...

and it's not just the teenagers!

Everyone is communicating electronically more and more frequently

and less and less personally...

When we actually do talk to a real person

we more often talking at the other person,

and even MORE rarely do we ever listen to the other...

According to the International Listening Association:

**we spend 45% of our time listening
but of that time: about 75% of the time,
we are distracted or preoccupied!**

**Truly listening to another —
is a skill that can and must be taught...**

**We begin to teach our children how to listen
by the manner in which we listen to them.**

**Listening is not just waiting for the other person to take a breath,
so that we can speak....**

**Real listening offers respect to the other person.
Really listening to the other acknowledges their humanity,
their needs and their desires as well as our own....**

**Now sometimes we are just too angry to even want to be respectful,
Sometimes we are too hurt.
But if we don't recognize the humanity of the other,
we will end up losing our own.**

**Truly listening to our opponent...to the one who has harmed us
can be scary...**

what if I see their point?

What if I can understand their feelings?

What if I actually did something to contribute to them feeling that way?

What if I find out that I was also wrong?

Truly listening is an essential skill on the path to true and lasting peace .

**The primary message of Jesus was that the Reign of God was here...now...
He understood that living inside the Reign of God in this lifetime
does not mean that everyone agrees about everything all the time.
He understood the human condition...
so he gave us his way resolving our eventual conflicts:
Listen to another, respect one another,
honor one another as a Child of the Most high
with a Divine Essence and soul...
just as we ourselves are...**

Have you ever tried to really listen?

It's hard!

**Most of the time while the other person is talking
we are thinking: oh, yeah...I had an experience like that and we can't wait
to tell our story...**

or...

**if we are having an argument, while the other person is talking,
we are lining up our brilliant and logical case
why we are right and they are wrong
and we hardly hear one word that they have said!**

**Resolving conflicts and disagreements through
mutual listening and respect is not the common way
maybe it is not even the easiest way....**

**It may not be the way "everyone else does it",
but as followers of the Christ, we are asked to walk a different path:
a path of mercy, compassion, respect, forgiveness and love...
we have said yes to this path...**

So did you remember that game telephone?

**As I recall, the we lined up in a straight line when we played...
because what the first person said was so different
than what the last person heard.**

**Perhaps if we truly listened when another person was speaking,
we would find ourselves not far apart first and last,
but in a circle connected and connecting to one another
And that would give us many reasons to say,
'thank you!'**

Amen.