

# You Are Invited to *Listen*...

The season of Lent is an invitation to a unique journey into the heart of humanity, and into your own heart.

For most of the Christian year, we live externally and organizationally: planning our day and the next event, attending concerts and answering e-mails, taking care of a spouse or sick child, getting the dishes done and groceries put away, arranging the party and balancing our monthly budget, sending our donation to the campaign and gathering supplies for the disaster's victims, completing an application and working on the latest quilt or woodcarving project we love to do. We have to *make* time for God, prayer, and worship within the ordering of our days, as so often our external living seems to be our only way of life.

Then along comes the season of Lent—again. Again it holds out its beautiful, simple invitation:

Come away with me for a while and be refreshed!  
Come journey with me into your fuller self, your deeper being,  
your heart where love and I dwell!

*I Am Listening* helps us to hear Christ's invitation and respond.

For each day of Lent *I Am Listening* provides a passage of scripture. It is not an entire Bible story, not even a part of a Bible story, but a verse or two of scripture. You may choose to read any number of verses that appear before and after. But then, this year, we encourage you to linger or rest with the suggested verse(s), to read the passage slowly and repeatedly until something in it trips you, catches your attention. It is like listening with the ear of your heart for God stirring within those few words.

Some people call this *lectio divina*, a Latin phrase that translates as “holy reading” or “reading the holy.” We might think of it as attentive listening to the passage. However we name this spiritual practice, it is a simple way of being a little closer to God, of loving God. We can use questions like,

What do these few words mean for me today? What might they be stirring within me? Why do they touch me? or Why don't they touch me? How might I respond to them now? Sometimes it feels as if we are drawing all the possible spiritual nurturing out of the verse(s). Sometimes it is like using the verse(s) as a stethoscope on our life. It may feel as if we hear only verbal noises within our self, but every doctor learns to distinguish the sounds she hears when she places her stethoscope on you. Amid all the noises within us, there is always the sound of our pulse of faith.

When you feel ready to move on from the verse, there is a reflection for the day. It may be written by a military chaplain, a member of the United Church Women (UCW), a child, youth, or seminary student; the contributors are from different backgrounds, and from all stages of the Christian journey. Yet every reflection has been written from the writer's heart, the heart of another unique human being journeying with you, seeking to love and be loved, as you do.

So often when reading we look first for the name of the writer and conclude how we will probably experience the text. Because this reflection is a time to enter your heart with God, the name of each writer is not given on the page. Instead, this year, let each text stand on its own. It can then become a precious link with God for you personally. At the back of the book, there is a list of who our writers are and which reflections they wrote. Some wrote one piece, others wrote more. They are the first to agree that the author is less important than the Author. They genuinely hope that their words will help you hear that Word most of all. If a particular piece moves you to do so, we can provide a way for you to contact each writer (e-mail us at [worship@united-church.ca](mailto:worship@united-church.ca)). They would be thrilled to hear from you!

Then there is a brief prayer. A hymn suggestion is also included for you to hum or sing quietly. Or you may prefer to experience the spiritual practice of resting with God by slowly reading the words of the hymn, as you would read a prayer.

Then we invite you to ponder over a question or two after each reflection. These questions will suggest ways to continue listening. Space has been left alongside most of the reflections to jot down your thoughts: keeping a spiritual diary is, like reflection, an ancient spiritual practice.

At the end of each week, you are invited to experience another ancient spiritual practice: the four-strand garland. It is a moment to look back over your journey through the week and to savour again the love, generosity, and patient grace of God you have experienced over the past seven days.

If your church or group of friends would like to share in a small group study based on *I Am Listening*, there are guidelines on page 113. The spiritual practices of reflection, praying a hymn, pondering, and journalling of *lectio divina* are even richer experiences when shared as a group. You needn't be an ordained minister to use this year's guide. Someone needs only to be willing to follow the guide, keeping an eye for the time on behalf of the whole group. You might each take a turn leading in this way. This ensures that all can experience and share of their journeys in ways that are safe and inspiring.

May your journey bring you deeply into the loving companionship of God and of your fellow travellers.

May it be a time of surprises, learnings, and joyful **Christian listening**.

Thanks be to God!

Betty Lynn Schwab