

Looking Out My Window, March 18, 2022



As we engage in the Holy Conversations during Lent, one of the protocols for table behavior we call Deep Listening. It reads “No cross talking. Please do not interrupt another or make interpretive comments about what they have said.” It normally proves challenging to listen in that way,, simply to receive what another says without any attempt to refute or “fix” it.

From what standpoint do you listen? Sound like a dumb question? But, the position from which we listen determines what we hear and how it affects us. Otto Scharmer, professor at MIT, and a futurist, articulates four listening positions. [1] “***I-in-me***”—what I observe based on my habitual ways of seeing/hearing. [2] “***I-in-it***”—what I perceive with senses and mind wide open. [3] “***I-in-you***”—what I tune in on and sense with my heart wide open. [4] “***I-in-now***”—What I grasp from my deepest self that I allow to impact my will.

These four positions he calls:

[1] ***Downloading***—“***Yeah, I know that already.***” When what you hear only confirms what you already know. Habitual patterns of listening.

[2] ***Factual—listening with an open mind.*** “***Ohh, look at that!***” You focus on the factual data that differs from what you already know.

[3] ***Empathic—listening with an open heart.*** “***Oh, yes, I know how you feel.***” This is “I-in-you” listening. “We forget about our own agenda and begin to see how the world unfolds through someone else’s eyes.” (Scharmer, p. 12).

[4] ***Generative—listening with an open will.*** “***I can’t express what I experience in words. . . . I am connected to something larger than myself,***” This kind of listening changes us, puts us into communion with the other, and alters how we move into the future and make decisions. (See Otto Scharmer, *Theory U: Leading from the Future as it Emerges*. (Barrett-Koehler, 2009), pp. 11-13; 187-88; 378-84).

During these Holy Conversations, we have the chance to practice moving beyond the first position (“Yeah, I know that already”) and stand more fully in the Factual, Empathic, and Generative positions. Practicing that way of listening in this Lent can carry over into our ongoing life and have a transforming effect on us individually and on Christ Church.

Such deep listening will interweave this community, lead to the treasuring of diversity, and pull us more fully in touch with what Spirit is up to among us.

God’s peace,

David

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