

Praying the News**Session 2 Audio Script: A Lens for Listening | Steve Berube**

*Hello Steve. Thank you for taking time to talk with me. Welcome to the Prayer Bench.
Thank you, Janice.*

When you hear the news what are you listening for?

I guess the thing I'm always listening for, and trying to pick up on, (and I've become particularly sensitive to this after spending time outside Canada where the news is shaped very differently,) is the perspective the story is told from. I'm always asking myself where is God in the story? Whose perspective is this story being told from? Is it the perspective of those who are on top? Or is it told from those who are on the margins? I ask: How does this story affect those who are on the margins, and those who are the least and the lost and the almost forgotten. So that's what I'm trying to listen for in terms of a news story.

Last week, there was an announcement that the New Brunswick government was erecting signs publishing the infrastructure work they are presently engaged in. The cost was about \$600-\$800 for each bill board. A couple of weeks before, there was a story about an indignity foisted upon those on the margins in NB society; people who need to go to social agencies for assistance with a family funeral. The government had cut back the amount offered to each family by \$600-\$800. It is convenient that new signs cost \$600-\$800. So they cut out the last dignity that a family can have of saying good bye to a loved one.

So, again it's those who are on the margins, and I don't know how they would hear the story, but I was filled with grief and sadness and a tinge of outrage. How can we as a society have lost our sense of compassion?

I often times ask myself where is God in this story? Where are the values we lift up as people of faith, and it doesn't matter if we are Christian, Jew, Muslim or Hindu, we all hold the same basic tenet that what is truly important in life is a sense of peace, hope and justice. So I'm asking these kind of questions of myself and listening not just for what is going on for people, but also how are people being affected indirectly.

One of the things the United Church has talked about recently is the focus on creation and the impact on the environment and the creatures that surround us. So I'm listening for where God is from this perspective, and how we are we responding as a nation, or a people or even as individuals in terms of our own faith life.

I am trying to ask those questions that have traditionally been asked at the core of the gospel and are the questions of the prophets. Bruggemann expresses it very well. He says the core issues of scripture is public, political and economic justice. That's what our faith is framed upon. We often times forget that. How are we reacting to, and building upon, those values that we traditionally hold: peace and justice and compassion.

In terms of the situation I am most involved in — peace and justice for people in Palestine and Israel — we hear one dominant voice in our media. Very seldom do we hear the voice of the Palestinians who have been living under occupation for 50 years, and who don't have a voice in the media in Canada.

There are many facets to a story, many lenses we can look through. The media tends to have a particular focus that is shaped by those who have privilege and power, and not those who are

on the margins. I'm trying to listen to the voices that are speaking out and asking: Who will benefit from a particular perspective? And I ask myself: Whose voice am I not hearing? Often it is those on the margins whose voices need to be heard because we are all God's children and all voices should count. Sometimes the media carries a bias that is tilted toward power and privilege.

And these days we hear a lot of conversation about "fake news." I'm not quite sure what those who have power and privilege mean by fake news. Is it holding people to account? Is it holding people to a level of accountability where their actions are held up against the values our society stands for? We don't like to talk about this very much but our values are rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition— caring for people with compassion, peace and justice. This is what our society is truly rooted in. It's not rooted in the xenophobia we are hearing, where one particular group needs to benefit. I often wonder who is really benefitting. What are the lenses we are looking through? How is the story being reported in a way that helps to paint how story impacts individuals?

One of the things I try to do is read from a variety of different sources. I read CBC. I will read Manchester Guardian, New York Times. And I will also look at things like Al Jazeera to see what perspective they might have on an issue and to hear it from a very different perspective. That's one of the blessings of the Internet. We can turn to other sources and we can find out what the people are saying and how they are being impacted.

When I was growing up, Walter Cronkite was the person we trusted. We trusted him because he had the sheer audacity to go to the front lines of Vietnam and see what was going on and come home and report on the truth. It wasn't just the fog of war. It wasn't just the Americans that were doing the good things and the Vietcong were the evil ones. He was bringing a balanced and nuanced perspective that spoke to the reality of the people in the situation.

The Jewish tradition of study is one we don't always think of as prayer. Karl Barth was famous for his quote of reading the bible in one hand with the bible in the other. To me, this is key to our faith. Study is a form of prayer. It is a way of digging deeper and trying to understand what the meaning of a situation is. Whether it is scripture we're reading or something in the media. Study is digging deeper and with more than a cursory glance, and trying to understand how God's people are being affected by this story. How are the values that God would have us live out being portrayed in this story.

Thank you.