Introduction: I can still see the image of my mom, lying on her side, on the floor with her head on a pillow, bracing herself for what was about to happen. You see, my mother was born with holes in her ear drums. And these holes caused great physical and emotional pain throughout her life. As a child she would get infections and so the holes in her ear drums would ooze and smell that made her an easy target for teasing. I believe that this teasing or bullying affected her greatly as a child and into her adult years.

I remember crying as I watched my mother suffer and yet the medicine was needed to prepare her for surgery on each ear drum. So this week as I have thought of our “open our ears” theme, I have thought of my mother who went through such pain, yet was the greatest listener a daughter could ever pray for. Oh how she would listen to my dreams and schemes, my worries and woes at all hours of the day and night.

Hearing can be difficult. Think about the technology we use in our world today. For those who have hearing aids, I would assume that many missed conversations and lack of being able to hear what was happening around you caused you to seek advice from a doctor and family to help you hear better. When technology doesn’t work the best, like a microphone cutting in and out at church, the frustration happens since something not working right is a disruption to the flow of the service.
We rely on technology to provide the volume and clarity that we need to hear, whether we truly hear the words or message being said is another story. If only there were devices for ourselves to truly hear and to truly listen to others who are sharing life stories and experiences with us. Now that would be a worthwhile invention.

Listening to others can be hard. From today’s theme, an ancient Greek philosopher notes that we have two ears and one mouth so that we can listen twice as much as we speak. I have also heard when counselors are trained they are advised to take the cotton out of their own ears to listen and to place that cotton in their mouths. Sounds like some good advice.

There is a lot of advice out there that reminds us of the importance of hearing. Jesus reminds us that we sometimes hear but don’t listen, listen but don’t understand. However, opening our ears isn’t as easy as it sounds. Just think back to the last time that someone was telling you an exciting story about something that had just happened in their life and instead of listening 100% most of us if truth be told are thinking about our own life and what story or experience that we have had that is similar or even tops the story that we are listening to...if we jump in with our story, that is called hijacking the moment and not the best thing to do and is actually pretty rude. It is so hard to listen to others without letting ourselves get in the way.

And when you think about it physically, our bodies can close our eyes, our bodies can close our mouths, yet our bodies, on their own cannot close our
ears. We would have to reach our hands to cover our ears. We must have much to learn through our ears. We have much to learn through listening.

**Open My Eyes, That I May See**

Open my ears, that I may hear

Voices of truth thou sendest clear;

And while the wave-notes fall on my ear,

Everything false will disappear.

Silently now I wait for thee,

Ready my God, thy will to see,

Open my ears, illumine me, Spirit divine!

At the Lenten Renewal, our presenter Dr. Owen Cummings talked about the shallow reading of scripture. Basically his point that we so often read scripture with the assumption that we already know the story and have heard the story before and therefore won’t learn anything else and simply breeze over the scripture. I believe that the same thing can happen when we listen to scripture being read or to another person sharing a story or experience. We don’t invest in truly listening or going deep in our listening to best understand another person’s experience or faith story sharing.

That has been part of the experience for those of you that have invested in attending the Lenten services at noon or 6:00. With each week we have
listened together to a story of faith brought to us by an individual member of New Life Lutheran. We have heard from Cynthia Marohl and Andrew Kellerman and we all have the opportunity to listen to the sharing’s of three more members, Kristi Cobbs, A.J. Brauer and Doris Creager, being reminded that we all have our own stories of faith to share.

We have so much to learn from one another stories of our lives of faith. Hearing people’s stories encourages us to contemplate our own stories that have something to tell about what our calling is about. We listen to stories and hopefully allow them to sink in to direct us in our lives of faith. We all have our stories while we are all called to listen to the faith stories of others.

Jesus was the master at story telling. He spoke and taught in parables. The mystery of the kingdom is revealed to disciples and hidden from others. Jesus teaches in parables because people see and hear but do not perceive, understand or repent, yet Jesus teaches and heals all.

Today’s bulletin shows Jesus knocking at the door. Revelation 3:20 “Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me.”

Proverbs 23:9 “Do not speak in the hearing of a fool, who will only despise the wisdom of your words.”

Isaiah 28:14 “Therefore hear the word of the LORD”

Matthew 11:15 “Let anyone with ears listen!”
Matthew 15:10 “The he called the crowd to him and said to them, Listen and understand: it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles.”

Matthew 17:5 “While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!”

Mark 7:37 “They were astounded beyond measure, saying He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak.”

John 10:3 “The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice.”

Acts 4:4 “But many of those who heard the word believed; and they numbered about five thousand.”

Romans 10:17 “So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ.”

James 1:19 “You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger...”

Revelation 3:22 “Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying...”

From Isaiah 50:4 “Morning by morning he wakens – wakens my ear to listen...” Thanks be to God. Amen.