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Fifty years ago, July 20, 1969. I was nine years old. I sat memorized watching the television broadcast of a historic event when Neil Armstrong set his foot upon a rock other than this rock we call Earth—a “small step for [a] man, one giant leap for mankind.” Apollo 11 took four days to reach the moon using a Saturn 5 rocket. When they arrived orbiting the moon, the command module carried three men in orbit around the moon. The lunar module carried two of these men to the moon while the third remained in orbit.

I was fascinated throughout my childhood with this event. I built a model of the rocket that carried the three astronauts to the moon and another model of the craft that landed on the moon. When I watched that event on TV, I had no idea what my life might be like 50 years later as we looked back on this first lunar landing, but here we are, with the anniversary approaching this coming Saturday.

Festivals are planned around the world: movies, concerts, museum exhibits. I wish I still had those models I had built years ago, for memorability is

probably quite valuable. Lego has created a 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary commemorative edition of the Lunar landing and the Apollo rocket, and Oreo has a purple Marshmallow Moon cookie to celebrate the event. Even scammers have tried to make a profit selling fake “authentic” Armstrong signatures or foil from the lunar lander.

I still have photos from the event produced by NASA that my Uncle gave me years ago—a piece of this historic event that I have moved from one house to another throughout the years.

What is it that captures our imaginations about this event, especially now, 50 years later? Since then we have landed on the moon numerous times, landed unmanned crafts on Mars, sent a spacecraft to Pluto, detected gravitational waves that originate millions of light years away, seen countless galaxies, discovered other planets orbiting other stars, and have seen a picture of a black hole. Our vision of the cosmos has rapidly expanded in our lifetimes, something the biblical writers could never have imagined.

Even though our vision of the world is so much different than their views, we share something in common with the writer of Psalm 40 who lived 2500 years ago, for the psalm begins:

I patiently waited, LORD,  
for you to hear my prayer.  
You listened <sup>2</sup> and pulled me  
from a lonely pit  
full of mud and mire. (CEV)  
and set my feet upon a rock,  
making my steps secure. (NRSV)

Ever had to wait patiently? Ever feel like it takes a while for God to hear your prayer? Ever felt as though you have been pulled out of a lonely pit? I imagine so. Although our technology has changed to set our foot upon the rock we call the moon, we still experience the same human emotions as the psalmist who lived thousands of years ago: waiting, striving to learn patience, falling in a pit, and feeling sure footed with our feet upon a rock.

It's sometimes in the midst of struggle, while we wait, that we discover new life around us, as was the case with

A sprawling, shade-bearing, eighty-year-old American elm in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, [which] is a huge tourist attraction. People pose for pictures beneath her. Arborists carefully protect her. She adorns posters and letterhead. The city treasures the tree, not because of her appearance but her endurance.

She made it through the Oklahoma City bombing. Timothy McVeigh parked his death-laden truck only yards from her. His malice killed 168 people, wounded 850, destroyed the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building, and buried the tree in rubble. No one expected it to survive. No one gave any thought to the dusty, branch-stripped tree.

But then she began to bud. Sprouts pressed through damaged bark; green leaves pushed away gray soot. Life rose from an acre of death. People noticed. The tree modeled the resilience the victims desired. So they named her the Survivor Tree.<sup>1</sup>

The writer of Psalm 40 also knew about survival, for he offered praise to God for what God has done in his life:

You, Lord my God!  
You've done so many things—  
your wonderful deeds  
and your plans for us—  
no one can compare with you!  
If I were to proclaim  
and talk about all of them,  
they would be too numerous to count! (CEB)

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Take a moment. What are those things God has done in your life? If you were to proclaim and talk about them, as the psalmist suggested, what would you say? Think for a few moments—what has God done in your life? ... If you feel comfortable, tell a person sitting next to you one marvelous thing God has done...

Isn't it amazing what God has been doing among us? Sometimes we have to pause and reflect, for it's easy to miss God's movement. We get so caught up in schedules and deadlines, visits to doctors or getting children ready for school or driving them to rehearsals, that we miss seeing God.

Other times we think we have to earn God's love and grace by doing something special, by being religious or perfect or making sacrifices. Listen to the psalmist's thoughts on this concern, as translated in *The Message Bible*:

Doing something for you, bringing something to you—  
that's not what you're after [God].  
Being religious, acting pious—

that's not what you're asking for.  
You've opened my ears  
so I can listen.

Letting God open our ears. Being able to listen. Hearing that still small voice within us that nudges us in certain directions. That's what God wants. That's not always easy, is it? Listening? With all the noise that surrounds us, sometimes it's hard to find silence in order to listen, but silence is part of the ingredient of listen. Did you know that the word *listen* has the same letters as the word *silent*?<sup>2</sup> Write down each word and notice the letters. The words are bound together not only with their letters, but in the very act of doing each word. Being silent permits us to listen, and in order to listen one must be silent.

One writer pondered the art of listening and recalled an experience from childhood when she listened to her brother answer the phone:

When my brother was about five years old, he wanted to answer the telephone, so he watched and listened [to our parents answer the phone] very carefully. One day he got to the phone first. He picked up the receiver and knew

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just what to say: “Hello, nope, good-bye!” and immediately hung up the phone. I think we sometimes make up our minds how to answer God without really listening to [God’s] message.<sup>3</sup>

Writer Roy Bennett suggests a way of listening to one another that relates to the way we listen to God:

Listen with curiosity. Speak with honesty. Act with integrity. The greatest problem with communication is we don’t listen to understand. We listen to reply. When we listen with curiosity, we don’t listen with the intent to reply. We listen for what’s behind the words.<sup>4</sup>

Isn’t it amazing that in the vastness of the universe, whether we set our foot upon the rock of the moon, or we listen to the gravitational waves from millions of light years away, or we listen for sounds of life on other planets, that God is listening to us and that we can listen to God? No matter what

happens in your life, know that God can pull you out of the pit of despair and set your feet upon a rock.

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<sup>4</sup> Roy T. Bennett, *The Light in the Heart*

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<sup>1</sup> Max Lucado, *Facing Your Giants* (W Publishing Group, 2006)

<sup>2</sup> Noticed by Alfred Brendel.

<sup>3</sup> Hodgins, Michael. *1002 Humorous Illustrations for Public Speaking: Fresh, Timely, Compelling Illustrations for Preachers, Teachers, and Speakers* (Kindle Locations 3654-3657). Zondervan. Kindle Edition, #554.