

September 1, 2017 - Listen for a Change

My retired pastor friend Tom Butts from Monroeville, AL, wrote a story long ago that I have never forgotten because it is so true and so helpful for the prospect of being Christian and human—which I take to be the same thing. Can we listen?

Some years ago, the late Erma Bombeck began one of her columns: “It was one of those days when I wanted my own apartment—unlisted! I was not in the mood for small talk; however, it was on that day my son had chosen to describe down to the very last detail a movie he had just seen and punctuated his monologue with a constant flow of ‘you know?’ On that same day there had been three telephone calls—three monologues that could have been answered by a recording. I fought the urge to say, ‘It’s been nice listening to you.’ ”

Later, on her way to the airport, she indicated that she was forced to listen to still another monologue. This time it was the taxi driver talking about his son who was away at college. Finally, at the airport, she indicated there were thirty beautiful minutes before her plane took off, leaving her time to be alone with her own thoughts and to open a book and let her mind wander. It was then that the voice next to her, belonging to an elderly woman, said: “I’ll bet it’s cold in Chicago.”

Stone faced, Erma Bombeck replied, “It’s likely.” The woman persisted: “I haven’t been in Chicago for nearly three years. My son lives there, you know.” “That’s nice,” said Bombeck, with her eyes intent on her book. Again the elderly woman spoke: “My husband’s body is on this plane. We’ve been married for 53 years. I don’t drive, you know, and when he died a nun drove me home from the hospital . . . The funeral director let me come to the airport with him.”

Erma Bombeck wrote, “I don’t think I have ever detested myself more than I did at that moment. Another human being was screaming to be heard, and, in desperation, had turned to a cold stranger who was more interested in a novel than she was in the real-life drama at her elbow. She needed no advice, money, assistance, expertise, or even compassion. All she needed was someone to listen. She talked numbly and steadily until we boarded the plane, and she took her seat. As I put my things in the overhead compartment, I heard her plaintive voice say to her seat companion: ‘I’ll bet it’s cold in Chicago.’ I prayed, ‘Please, God, let her listen.’ ”

Do you understand that Christians take time to listen?

Come—Worship

Stay—Learn

Go—Serve!