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In Laura James's painting, *Sermon on the Mount*, the disciples gather in rapt attention around Jesus, who stands larger than life, with arms opened in a cruciform pose.

Gathered to Listen

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Matthew's Gospel describes the context of the Sermon on the Mount this way: "Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them" (Matthew 5:1-2, NIV).¹ Laura James, a New York-born artist of Antigua immigrants, depicts this scene as a lesson for the Church. The disciples, including but not limited to the twelve Apostles, left the crowds and gathered in a closer group to listen to Jesus' words. Similarly, we most effectively hear the gospel message in an intentional listening group, as members of the body of Christ.

Of course, speaking to a group is the most efficient way to get the word out. It takes far less time than speaking to each person individually. (Social media have proven this via Instagram, Twitter, Vine, and Facebook for the "older" generation.) But God's message, unlike the quick reading of a tweet, requires sustained attention, reflection, and meditation. Really listening to it requires that we be in a community of faith that guides our attention through a blend of living, working, and learning together.

In James's painting, the disciples gather in rapt attention around Jesus, who stands in their midst larger than life, with arms opened in a cruciform pose. Though the disciples appear at first to be just a simplified, bright, balanced mass of color, on closer inspection they are individuals with varying facial characteristics, hairstyle, clothing type and color, and gesture or hand position. Despite the patterned repetition of these features, no two figures in the image are exactly the same. To notice this subtlety of diverse elements within James's unified and harmonious composition requires attentive study by the viewer, much like that required of disciples to discern the meaning of God's message.

To embody Christ's teachings, members of his Body perform different but complementary roles. "But this diversity is harmonious rather than cacophonous because it is ordered by Christ the Head, who gives the members specific purposes within the Church," Lindsey Brigham and Wayne Martindale explain. "The members do not collectively do the same thing, but neither do they each individually do their own thing: within the Church, their diversity becomes a means both to serve and to govern one another."²

NOTES

1 THE HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION® NIV® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

2 See Lindsey Brigham and Wayne Martindale, "Not Marching, but Dancing," on pp. 19-25 in this issue.