



table talk

2/22/26

Every President's Day, I recall my second-grade teacher telling us the story of the first President to ever wear a beard. The man was famous for several things, but it was the beard story that got me interested. She told us about an 11-year-old girl named Grace Bedell who had become a pen-pal with Abraham Lincoln as he campaigned to become the nation's 16th President.

Grace had written a very bold letter, especially by 1860 standards:

"Dear Sir,

I am a little girl only 11 years old but want you to be the President of the United States very much so I hope you won't think me very bold to write such a great man as you are.

I have got four brothers and part of them will vote for you anyway and if you will let your whiskers grow I will try to get the rest of them to vote for you; you would look a great deal better for your face is so thin. All the ladies like whiskers and they would tease their husbands to vote for you and then you would be President."

Four days later Lincoln responded, thanking her for her letter and saying he would consider it, though he was concerned that he was too old and set in his ways to make such a change.

Four months later, President-Elect Lincoln's train, while taking him to his inauguration in Washington, made a brief stop in Westfield, New York – the hometown of Grace.

Lincoln began his greeting to his followers in Westfield:

"I have a little correspondent in this place, Grace Bedell, and if she is present will she please come forward?"

An old man pressed through the crowd, holding the hand of his daughter, Grace.



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Lincoln stepped off the train, sat beside her on the station platform and said “Grace, look at my whiskers. I have been growing them for you.” He then kissed the little girl, who was so embarrassed by the reaction of her neighbors that she ran all the way home without giving Lincoln the flowers she had brought for him.

Did I think her suggestion got Lincoln elected? Not that I recall. What amazed me was that a man who had just defeated three rivals in a hopelessly divided nation, took the time to listen to the counsel of a child.

I never recall the story without remembering that the ability to listen to “still, small voices” is often one of the hallmarks of truly great people.

Acts 15 chronicles the event that threatened to terminally divide the young church. But James, the brother of Jesus, was able to diffuse the situation by saying confidently, “This then is my decision.” And the church grew exponentially because it listened.

Years earlier, the Jerusalem church stopped growing because of a dispute over the care of widows. The Apostles prayed. God gave wisdom, and the people listened. The church began to grow again (Acts 6:1-7).

Judges is the history of an era when “every person did what was right in their own eyes.” I fear we are in such an era today.

Proverbs warns “there is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it always results in death.” (Proverbs 14:12)

Many hear, not so many listen. Still fewer obey. Take time to consider this, and thank God for voices in your life worth listening to.

I love you,
Pastor Stephen