Listen Up

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Imagine that you engage in separate one-on-one conversations with each of the following people:

The first is with Mary, a fifty-something mother of a thirty-something daughter from Ohio. The second is with John, a thirty-something father of three young children from Massachusetts.

After you listen to how each opens their conversation with you on the following two slides, consider and make notes on what you would say to each in response...
“I just think...”

... it’s crazy what’s been goin’ on. GM shut down. Okay. So Amazon comes in. GM paid real money, good benefits. Amazon? May as well be babysitting, like when I was a kid... part-time, different shifts same week, no benefits. Trade and illegals are the problem. This ain’t new. Been goin’ on a long time now. I just think we gotta get somebody in there that’s gonna straighten this mess out. The system ain’t working, at least not for me. Not for my kid. It has to get shook up.” ~Mary
“Melissa was beautiful...

... and she still is; she’s six now. But she hasn’t been Melissa since she got those shots. I know they say there’s no evidence that one causes the other. But isn’t some of that research done by the pharmaceutical companies? Don’t they say that drugs are so expensive because they do so much research? Right? All I know is that she was a perfect baby, and then she changed, after those shots. So no, I’m their father. I have to protect her little brother and sister. They are not getting vaccinated.” ~ John
Two Poems

Now go on to listen to the voices represented in the following two poems.

Reflect first on what you hear in those voices. Then consider how they intersect with the voices of Mary and John, and whether that impacts on how you might listen to and respond to Mary and John in any ways that vary from your initial response.
What Work Is

We stand in the rain in a long line
waiting at Ford Highland Park. For work.
You know what work is—if you’re
old enough to read this you know what
work is, although you may not do it.
Forget you. This is about waiting,
shifting from one foot to another.
Feeling the light rain falling like mist
into your hair, blurring your vision
until you think you see your own brother
ahead of you, maybe ten places.
You rub your glasses with your fingers,
and of course it’s someone else’s brother,
narrower across the shoulders than
yours but with the same sad slouch, the grin
that does not hide the stubbornness,
the sad refusal to give in to
rain, to the hours of wasted waiting,
to the knowledge that somewhere ahead
a man is waiting who will say, “No,
we’re not hiring today,” for any
reason he wants. You love your brother,
now suddenly you can hardly stand
the love flooding you for your brother,
who’s not beside you or behind or
ahead because he’s home trying to
sleep off a miserable night shift
at Cadillac so he can get up
before noon to study his German.
Works eight hours a night so he can sing
Wagner, the opera you hate most,
the worst music ever invented.
How long has it been since you told him
you loved him, held his wide shoulders,
opened your eyes wide and said those words,
and maybe kissed his cheek? You’ve never
done something so simple, so obvious,
not because you’re too young or too dumb,
not because you’re jealous or even mean
or incapable of crying in
the presence of another man, no,
just because you don’t know what work is.

~ Philip Levine
The Music Of Our Distance
Plays As Slow As Possible
In Twelve Tones

“I am for the birds,
not for the cages
people put them in.”

~ John Cage,
American composer

dear will,
loving you is like breathing ---
constant, effortless.
finding you is hard, like leaving you,
hard as being left,
mystical as breath.

we called you william;
your brother made you will.
autism
is what they call
our distance.
love, mom and dad
their studies claim that early,
when I felt you look past me,
my own gaze failed to capture
how your each move frayed.

their coded baby movies show
we loved but couldn’t see
your empty face, your inward gait,
the stranger in your reach.

now their newest science mimics
how you look right through my heart.
they image blood flow in your brain,
picturing your art
for repetition
for repetition
for every day
for everyday
the same
thesame
for responding
forresponding
with reflection
withreflection
when your brother
whenyourbrother
asks to play:
“Let’s catch, Will!”
“Lesskeshwill,”
you say.
as you rock your
steady rhythm
silent music
shapes our space.
we learn
to dance
your way
yourway.

~ Joe Cunningham
Discussion
Benefits of Listening To Our Seeming Adversaries

- We will model the respect and openness that we hope to receive.
- We and they may have things in common (e.g., shared experiences, motives and feelings).
- We may better understand what we believe, why we believe it, and how best to express that with clarity and humility.
- We are more open to listening to someone who has listened to us; if we listen first, we improve our odds of being heard.
Listening Steps and Strategies

- While ‘listening,’ resist tendency to start formulating my rebuttal.
- When the speaker stops, wait three beats before saying anything.
- Repeat what I think I’ve heard, and ask if I’ve got it right.
- Ask the speaker to tell me more about parts I disagree with the most.
- Ask about related experiences, motives and feelings, beyond beliefs and rationale.
Responding Steps and Strategies

- Begin with an area of agreement, probably in shared experience, motivation, and feelings.
- Aim for self-deprecating humor, and something I like about the other person.
- Express shared *and* divergent beliefs, grounding them in any shared experience, motivation, and feelings.
- Express costs *and* benefits of shared and divergent beliefs, and compare notes on same.
Written Exchange Sometimes

*Trumps* Spoken Exchange

- Editing message ------> Clearer expression
- Rereading message ---> Clearer reception
- Delaying response ----> Clearer expression and reception

