

Hearing The Voice Of God

January 14, 2018 - 2nd Sunday after epiphany

Epiphany is the season for the invisible and divine to take upon physical appearance. It is the light within us and about us becoming what our eyes can see and hands can touch.

I love this passage from The Book of Samuel. If you are not familiar with the story of Samuel, he was born as a result of a plea from his mother to God that she might bear a son. Her promise, if God would grant her prayer, was to dedicate the boy to God's service. And so when it came about that she bore a son, she dedicated him at the temple where he was raised and served. In the passage this morning, the time is described "*the word of the lord was rare in those days.*"

It is true, isn't it, that there are simply times in life, personally and culturally, when the voice of God is muted. All grows quiet in the deeper places and all we hear is the daily news, the voices of talk jocks, the opinions on social media, and the collective ethos of popular culture. Our conversations recycle the continuous debate over the issues of the day. Our loyalties are defined by our politics and ethnicity. And our spirituality is subservient to our appetites and comfort.

I also believe that there are simply times of sustained silence from God for good reason. Perhaps, we are learning to be patient, to faithfully persist in what we have already heard and know. Maybe God is seeing how long we will go without hearing fresh instruction, or receiving renewed inspiration?

It was Jesus who said, "we do not live by bread alone, but by every word proceeding from the mouth of God." This suggests that we need to hunger and cultivate a steady diet of hearing from God. Of going deeper than the voices of those who rant on the radio or pontificate from pulpits, or the endless stream of memes posted on social media. We need to give ourselves to the transformational exercise of listening to God's voice and seeing God's presence in our life.

When Samuel was hearing the voice of God his inclination was to go to his mentor, Eli, thinking it was he who was speaking to him. Eli told him to stop fidgeting up and down and simply lie still and say, "Speak, Lord, your servant is listening."

The psalmist proclaims, "You have searched me out and known me, you know my sitting down and my rising up, you discern my thoughts from afar. You trace my journeys and my resting places and are acquainted with all my ways."

All the world spiritual traditions, including our own, suggest that God is closer to us than we rarely realize. And in our own sense of being. Being born, being alive, being still we have the natural ability to simply be still and know God's presence. To sit quietly and hear God's voice.

I believe we are in a time when the voice of God is rarely heard. I mean how can a voice that is heard in the deep, still, and quiet places be heard when few will go there to listen to it. We can't hear God if we are occupied with mobile devices. We can't hear God if we are given to the factious divide of humanity between right and left, rural and urban, religious and on-religious, north and south, wealthy and peasant. We can't hear God if we have bought in to ideology that dismisses that excludes broad swaths of wondrous and divinely created persons and cultures. We can't hear God if we have been consumed by the rejection of faith, hope, and love in exchange for a harsh sense of despair and disbelief.

At some point, we must give ourselves to the one who unites and heals as opposed to dividing and conquering. We must give ourselves to the one who creates and imagines instead of deconstructs and mocks. We must give ourselves to the one who wonderfully makes all kinds of persons who bring their own light into the world.

Yesterday morning, I spent just a few minutes sitting quietly while watching the fat snowflakes gently descend through the air. It was nurturing and calming. Instead of wrestling with the cold or shoveling the snow, I chose to enjoy it for what it provided. Beauty and peace. Now those are words from the heart of God, beauty and peace.

Epiphany invites us into the quiet and contemplative places where the voices are neither angst nor angry, evocative or provactive, divisive nor demeaning. In the quiet and still places we hear the word of love, beauty, peace, and hope, transformational and profound.

How deep I find your thoughts, O God! How great is the sum of them.
How sweet I find your words, my Lord, They are like honey and fine wine.