

03.31.19

Westminster Presbyterian Church

The Greatest Voice

One of the lessons my seminary teaches us is that everyone reads scripture differently. As we are talking about God's voice and hearing God through different means, I am going to read our scripture again, emphasizing different things.

Psalm 29: The Voice of God in a Great Storm:

¹ A Psalm of David

Ascribe to the Lord, O heavenly beings,
ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.

² Ascribe to the Lord the glory of [the Lord's] name;
worship the Lord in holy splendor.

³ The voice of the Lord is over the waters;
the God of glory **thunders**,
the Lord, over mighty waters.

⁴ The voice of the Lord is **powerful**;
the voice of the Lord is **full of majesty**.

⁵ The voice of the Lord **breaks the cedars**;
the Lord breaks the cedars of Lebanon.

⁶ [The Lord] makes Lebanon skip like a calf,
and Sirion like a young wild ox.

⁷ The voice of the Lord **flashes forth flames of fire**.

⁸ The voice of the Lord **shakes the wilderness**;
the Lord shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.

⁹ The voice of the Lord **causes the oaks to whirl**,
and **strips the forest bare**;
and in [the Lord's] temple all say, "Glory!"

¹⁰ The Lord sits enthroned over the flood;
the Lord sits enthroned as king forever.

¹¹ May the Lord give strength to [the Lord's] people!

May the Lord bless [the Lord's] people with peace!

(This is the Word of the Lord) (thanks be to God)

The voice of God

In my Hebrew class last year, my professor said something interesting. He told us we had to learn Hebrew because that was the language that God speaks. My professor was very worried that we wouldn't be able to understand if Jesus walked into our lives and started speaking in Hebrew. He seemed worried that God wouldn't be able to communicate with us because we weren't paying attention to Hebrew class. Obviously, he was joking, mostly to attempt to get us to care about learning Biblical Hebrew. But honestly, once I started thinking about it, it caught my attention. If I did not understand Biblical Hebrew, how would I ever understand God? If I did not understand Biblical Greek, how would I understand Jesus?

I have a question- please raise your hands- Who in this room can read or speak Biblical Hebrew? Who in this room can read or speak Biblical Greek? Okay, how about French? Spanish? German? English? These are all wonderful languages, and I find languages fascinating.

But, I'm having a problem here- I can't seem to find where in this passage it says we are meant to hear God's voice in the Biblical Hebrew, or Greek, or French, Spanish. There is nowhere that says God will only speak to us in English. The author of our psalm seems to forget to mention that God will speak in any specific language at all. And if that is the case, how will we know what language to learn?

Looking closer, maybe more often, we will not hear a physical voice at all. The Hebrew word in this passage is קול (Kole) which can mean either "voice" or "sound." For example, when this is used in a relationship with animals, it literally means the voice of the sheep or the voice of the cattle, so it is translated as "the bleating of sheep" or "the lowing of cattle." Because we understand God in an anthropomorphic way, we

understand God's "sound" to be a physical voice. However, I would like to challenge you to think about what other sounds God would make, rather than just a voice.

Where do we hear God's voice

And if it isn't just a voice, where can we hear the sound of God? Many times if you ask people where they experience God, they will answer you with different spaces within nature that they feel closest to the Divine Being. Thunder, lightning, wind, mountains, oceans, all these things are specific places and occurrences that people experience God's voice and presence. In fact, I particularly appreciate when God is speaking through our thunderstorms. In our passage, we hear that "the God of glory thunders," and I believe it is incredibly spiritual to experience the sound barrier being ripped apart during thunderstorms. Often my deepest prayers are during those storms. However, the voice of God is also completely present in the silence of a chapel. Or when there is just a little bit of a breeze rustling the trees. Or in the laughter of people. Remember in 1 Kings, when Elijah is called to by God: 1 Kings 19:11-13: **11** [The Lord] said, "Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by." Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; **12** and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. **13** When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then there came a voice to him that said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

This isn't a hide and seek game that we are playing with God where we are seeking the specific sound God makes rustling around in the trees and if we find that specific sound, we will "win". It's not a cell phone commercial that God is asking us "can you hear me now?" God isn't hiding from us, and God isn't checking in every moment to make sure we can hear. We may simply not be listening for God, and if we think we're listening, are we listening to the right things? If we are waiting specifically for the VOICE

FROM HEAVEN, that voice that may sound a bit like Morgan Freeman, maybe we aren't listening for the right things. God's voice can be in an infinite number of things. Even in our Psalm, we don't actually hear the noise, we understand the effect of God's voice. God's voice: breaks the cedars, flashes forth in flames of fire, shakes the wilderness, causes the oaks to swirl.

This sound isn't an ignorable sound. We would absolutely perceive cedars breaking, fire flashing, wilderness shaking, and oaks swirling. However, if we are simply listening to a voice, we may not perceive that these things really could be the sound of God.

God's speaking directly to each of us

So, here is the catch, God is absolutely speaking to each and every one of us. Specifically and intentionally speaking to us in a way that we are expected to hear, and obey. In seminary, we talk a lot about God's call and the sound we heard when being called into ministry. Often people will discuss multiple people in different parts of their lives suggesting a path of ministry or others will talk about how they couldn't make themselves stay away from ministry no matter how many times they tried. Many times people find their call after hearing time and time again from other people that they should try this job or that job. We listen if people around us say the same thing over and over again. Have you considered, maybe that is God calling us? Maybe you have felt like there was a job you couldn't stay away from even if you tried. Maybe there was a sign right when you needed one the most.

The interesting thing of recognizing God's call and God's sound is that ministry isn't the only call that God gives. Often the things we are most passionate about are the call God has placed on our lives. I feel like many times we don't talk express our passions as God's call. However, this is exactly what it is. I know my sister felt the same amount of a call toward being a math teacher as I felt to seminary. I know my brother tried many times to not be an artist, but that call has found him time and time again. They are both living out their calls and changing lives through their own lives.

When did each of the women hear God?

God never said it would be easy to hear or accept these calls, just like God does not call in any specific way or in only one way. In fact, we rarely hear *how* God calls the women of our Bible. We don't always hear the sounds that the women heard, we don't always know what was said to them by the people around them. But we know what their call was because we have *those* stories.

In the book of Judges, we read the story of Deborah. She was a Judge of Israel even though women weren't judges in that time. However, Israel called out to God after they had disobeyed God time and time again. Because God had appointed Deborah, and she followed God, Israel was saved from the army of Sisera and there was peace for 40 years.

In the book of Joshua, we read about Rahab, a prostitute. She specifically lied to the king of Jericho, and instead of giving up two Israelite spies, she hid them on her roof before letting them escape down the back wall. Her family was saved because of her actions with the spies.

The entire book of Ruth, as well as the book of Esther, are entire stories of two women who have loyalty, and courage and fight against all odds to protect their families. Ruth chooses her family and remains connected to them even though her mother in law has told her to go back to her own family. Esther risks her own life to convince the king to protect her people. In the end, the Jewish people were honored because of Esther's risk and willingness to fight for her people.

Genesis tells many stories of women who were fighting systems against them. In one narrative, Abraham sends his wife Sarah into 2 different kings' houses and she still becomes the mother of nations. Abraham cast out Hagar, who was Sarah's slave. Hagar was sent into the wilderness after giving birth to Abraham's son, Ishmael. Even with all the systems fighting against these women, they still became mothers whose offspring outnumbered the sand.

Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Jesus are written about in the gospels, even if they are not always named. These women became some of the first

women-preachers because they were told to go tell the story of Jesus' resurrection. While people did not believe them, until the disciples saw it for themselves, they continued to spread the stories of the good news of Jesus. They led the way of women being able to preach and lead the Church.

These stories are important because we know these women were called by God to be present in the moment they worked in. We know that God called these women because they were not perfect, they were not without blame, and they were from the sidelines of society. These women were the ones specifically chosen by God, throughout our history to complete their own calls. The calls they received were not reliant on anyone else, they were all their own.

As we are celebrating the gifts of women today, I hope to remind us all that God does not speak in only a voice. The women of our scriptures heard God in different ways, we do not have those stories. However, we know what the outcomes were. We have the story of Elijah, hearing God in the sheer silence. We have the stories of Mary hearing God through messengers and angels. God does not only speak English, or Hebrew, or Greek. And if we are only listening for those sounds, if we are only looking in the thunder, or in the wind, or in the fire, we may not be listening for all the sounds of God. All the voices that God can speak in. We have our own stories of God's call on our lives. And friends, let me remind you- God is absolutely speaking to every single one of us. You are called for a specific purpose and for this specific moment in this world. There is nothing we can do to run from this call, we must listen for the voice of God to know God's path for us and to truly understand what God needs us to do in and through our lives.

Please pray with me,

God,

Your sounds break the cedars, your sounds cause the oaks to whirl and your sounds flash forth flames of fire. God help us hear your voice in our lives, even when your sound is sheer silence. Lead us forward in your call on our lives. You speak in many ways God, and you are the one above all and through all things. Keep us present and attentive to your way.

In your most holy and awesome name,

Amen.