

Church of the Redeemer

Moline Sermon Transcripts

Sunday June 3rd: Hearing God

A few weeks back, a leading television talk show hostess said, “It’s one thing to talk to Jesus; it’s another thing when Jesus talks to you, that’s called mental illness.”

But then, our much beloved prayer book reads, “We call Holy Scriptures the Word of God because God inspired their human authors and because God still speaks to us today through the bible.” God Talks To Us!

God can speak to us through the Prayer Book, through Holy Scripture, through our reasoned and traditional interpretation of Scripture. He can speak to us through the love of a good neighbor, through the words and strong faith of a small child or the smile of a baby. He can speak to us through music, preachers, teachers, nature, and even through storms, suffering, silence, solitude and meditation. God has so many tools of communication at his service.

Jesus said, “My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me.” We can’t expect those who don’t know the shepherd to hear the shepherd.

In our first reading this morning, the young man Samuel hears the audible voice of God and doesn’t recognize it. The passage says that Samuel “did not yet know the Lord.” He thinks it is the voice of Eli his teacher and mentor calling out to him in the darkness. After three times, Eli who apparently doesn’t hear the voice, but knows God, recognizes it as God calling out to Samuel.

How do we avoid a Samuel-like confusion when God speaks to us? How can we recognize God’s voice when we do hear it?

There is a simple formula for hearing God, and its found in our own Anglican theology of the “Three-legged stool.” Our theology, or the system by which we relate to God, rests atop a three-legged stool. The first leg is Holy Scripture, the second is human Reason, and third leg is Church Tradition. I believe this basic foundation of our Episcopal theology can keep us attune to God’s voice. God given Scripture, reason and tradition can keep us from straying from the truth in Christ.

Many churches identify as Solo Scriptura – that is a theology built upon scripture alone – we prefer a sturdier foundation of three legs.

Eighteen years ago, most Episcopalians avoided that false prophesy of Y2K simply because of a healthy balance of Scripture, Reason and Tradition. Y2K as a spiritual

happening, as anything other than a computer glitch was not scriptural, was unreasonable and non-traditional.

How do we hear God? First and foremost, we must have more than a vague & passing acquaintance with Holy Scripture. Anything less than regular prayerful bible study makes us very vulnerable to those who have God all figured out for us.

We also hear the voice of God through the prayerful application of human reason. I hope this is not said out of arrogance, but we are a **thinking Person's Church**. Being the thinking person's church presupposes the thoughtful realization that we are not the only thinking person's church. It's just that I grew up in a church where it was against the unwritten rules to even think other than the church thought. It was a great sin to question God. We all had questions, but we kept them buried somewhere in the back of our minds where God couldn't possibly be offended by them – much less answer them.

I believe the quickest route to spiritual deafness is to close our eyes, our ears, our hearts and especially our mind's to different thinking within the Body of Christ. God is not intimidated by our sincere questions. Our faith has many mysteries.

The third leg of our theology is **tradition**, which admittedly seems to be the least of these. Such is probably the case because we tend to become so exercised over those traditions which matter the very least. Friendships have been jeopardized over which liturgical color is to be used in celebration of the annunciation when many believers don't even celebrate March the 25th.

However, there is church tradition which is of such significance so as to be absolutely crucial to the truth. One such example might be the celebration of the sacraments in a language understood by the worshippers, another might be access to the common cup. We hear the voice of God in the sacraments. Our traditions in just how we incorporate those sacraments in our common worship has endured the test of time and saints for countless generations. God's voice is there for the hearing.

Scripture, reason and tradition not only enable us to hear the voice of God, but serves to guide us as God directs us.

Mother Teresa of Calcutta wrote:

“Prayer is not asking. Prayer is putting ourselves in the hands of God, at his disposition, and listening to his voice in the depths of our hearts.”