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Isaiah 42: 1 – 9
Acts 10: 34 – 43

Psalm 29
Matthew 3: 13 – 17

“He will not cry or lift up his **voice**, or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench.”

“The **voice** of the Lord is over the waters;
the God of glory thunders, the Lord is upon the mighty waters...
The **voice** of the Lord is a powerful voice;
the **voice** of the Lord is a **voice** of splendor...
The **voice** of the Lord breaks the cedar trees;
the Lord breaks the cedars of Lebanon...
The **voice** of the Lord splits the flames of fire;
the **voice** of the Lord shakes the wilderness...
The **voice** of the Lord makes the oak trees writhe,
and strips the forests bare...”

“And a **voice** came from heaven, ‘This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.’”

The voice of God. In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. Jesus, the fullest expression of God, the Word with a capital ‘W.’ Our lessons today are filled with the voice of God.

But what is the voice of God like? Is it quiet, tender and gentle, so as not to break a bruised reed or extinguish a dim flame with its very breath? Or is it a booming, crashing, loud and thunderous voice, a voice like a tornado, a hurricane or a tsunami, flattening forests of large trees and swirling up the waters of the seas? Is it a both/and? Or a neither/nor? Or are there other possibilities?

About a week and a half ago, the December writer in *Forward Day by Day* wrote about his experience of the voice of God. When the writer was young, his father took him to see the epic movie, *The Ten Commandments*. In the movie, the voice of God (the human identity of which, according to IMDB, is the subject of considerable controversy) was low-pitched, solemn and very loud. It made a significant impression on the young boy. He compared it to the sound of “many waters.” But the writer goes on to say that this first experience of the voice of God and all the ones since in movies or on TV have had little or nothing to do with his own personal experience of hearing the voice of God speaking in his heart. While God may speak loudly on occasion, such as through Beethoven’s *Ninth Symphony*, most of the time, the writer perceives God’s voice more like a whisper, like that ‘still small voice’ or the ‘sound of sheer silence,’ as it is described in the book of First Kings.

Probably many of *our* conceptions of God’s voice also come from movies or other cultural sources. Think George Burns, or James Earl Jones, or Morgan Freeman. It might be worth pondering what we really THINK – or assume – God’s voice sounds like, versus any actual experience we have of feeling that God has somehow spoken to us. Do any of us feel like God has ever spoken to us in some

way? If so, what has that been like? I wonder if our preconceived ideas of what we *think* we're listening for determines whether or not we actually perceive God's voice.

Seventeenth century Anglican priest and poet, Thomas Traherne, theorized that we, humanity, can never fully understand the world until we sense the divine voice that speaks all of creation, including us, into being. Traherne suggests that all the world bears within it the hidden music of the Creator God's loving communion (and communication) with us.

Mark McIntosh, writing in his book, *Mysteries of Faith*, in the new Church Teaching Series, postulates that God's universe, that is, all of the cosmos, is "a whispering, speaking universe in which each and every creature is part of the alphabet, the language, God uses to speak to us." And that, McIntosh says, "includes acts of great love or simple human kindness in which we sometimes become a powerful word to one another of God's presence." By working in and through each element of the universe this way, God imbues each creature with a "marvelous potential for glory, a whispering destiny of great hope." This is because the miracle is that we are not *less* but rather *more* our true selves by fulfilling our potential as God's speech. In other words, we not only move closer to God and to one another when we allow God to speak in and through us, we become more of whom God created each of us to be in the first place.

And it isn't just us, it is each part of creation living into its essential nature when it is used as God's speech. Take water for instance. Its created nature is to be wet, with the power to cleanse and to purify, to take life and to give life. And where is any of that more evident than in the sacrament of Holy Baptism, whether the baptism of John, or our own, or little Maverick's, who will experience this glory in just a few moments? In the same way, ordinary, everyday food and drink, bread and wine, become something more when they are the Eucharist, the Bread of Life and the Cup of Salvation, the Body and Blood of Christ. It is God speaking through wine and bread and water and us which transforms this world into the Kingdom of God, where everywhere and everything is filled with the voice of God.

McIntosh draws an analogy. Suppose you or I were given the gifts to be an extraordinary composer. Anything and everything around us – a child's delight in a caterpillar, the stars spangled against the inky night sky, the rhythmic whoosh of a wind turbine – might be the inspiration for our annotations on a page as musical notes. But we live among people who have never experienced music, whether written or sung or played. And while these people sense the varying vibrations in the air, it is simply noise, not music. Imagine the experts among them trying to decipher the meaning of the little black dots and lines and squiggles on the page that appear meaningless. There are no musical instruments, and if we try to sing our composition, the people either run to hug and comfort us as someone in terrible pain, or cover their ears and try to lead us away to a place where no one will have to experience our peculiarities.

But over time, McIntosh says, some people, perhaps a bit odd themselves, come to visit us. We sing to them; we try to teach them to keep rhythm with their hands or feet. Gradually, these people become aware of something that they had never noticed before. Amidst all the buzzing and chaotic noise, they begin to perceive that some of the sounds are actually in a pattern. And that the sounds, the patterns, express emotion and meaning. These people have discovered music! They are able to transcend what they had previously considered only confusion and noise into a whole new dimension of life. In a way, McIntosh writes, these people developed the power to experience and appreciate the music because you or I have sung it into them.

McIntosh's point with this analogy is to suggest that throughout the whole history of life on earth, from when time began and even before, God has been speaking and singing and loving – and perhaps dancing – all of creation into one dimension of life after another. Isn't that an interesting idea, that God has been whispering and waltzing and wooing us and the rest of creation through time and space and dimension? The question for each of us as individuals, and as a people, is this: will we risk ourselves, our hearts, our minds, our souls and our bodies, will we risk all that we are and all that we have to fall in love with God?

Twentieth century Archbishop of Canterbury, William Temple, noted that the personal God in whom we believe, in whom we live and move and have our being whether we know it or not, this personal God that we, as Christians, claim, can only truly be revealed in and through people. Through persons. Through us. However imperfectly that might be.

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God (a breath, a Spirit?) swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, "..."

In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being through him was life.

"The universe as a whole, and human life in particular as a responsive and loving part of the universe, are being spoken by the same Word." In a few moments, we will welcome Maverick Deen into the Body of Christ. Baptism is the beginning of seeing the dots and scribbles on the page which, if we follow the journey, become the music of the spheres, the voice of God echoing through time and space and all eternity. As we splash that water of death and life, that water that cleanses and purifies, as we make our vows to support this new little person in his life in Christ, may we begin to speak God's love to him, that is, may we allow the voice of God to speak in us and through us. May we become a powerful word to him and to one another of God's presence. May we introduce Maverick to the whispering and waltzing and wooing Creator God who has spoken him and us and all of creation into being.

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