

Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.

I want to share with you a story by an unknown author entitled: "Hagar's Search for God."

One of the world's most loved comic strips is Hagar the Horrible. In one strip we find Hagar kneeling in prayer. "It's not easy to believe in you, God. We never see you. How come you never show yourself? How do we know you even exist..." Next we see

- a flower springing into life beside Hagar,
- a volcano erupting in the distance,
- an eclipse of sun turning the sky black,
- a star shooting across the stratosphere;
- a tidal wave rushing over Hagar,
- lightning flashing,
- a bush beginning to burn,
- a stone rolling away from the entrance to a tomb.

Hagar pulls himself from the mud, dripping wet, surrounded by darkness. "OK, OK. I give up! Every time I bring up this subject, all we get is interruptions."

The readings for today have a common theme. The verses refer to an encounter that all of us have had at some point in our lifetime and it has become known as the "aha" experience. It is that moment of immediate insight in which a life issue that we may have been wrestling with is made clear. It is as if a weight has been lifted off of us and there is a sense of calm, a feeling of peace. In a Psychology 101 textbook, there was a cartoon of a person having one of these moments and it showed a light bulb turned on over the figure's head. That "aha" experience where we "see the light". Or maybe it's that certain moment that God's presence becomes known to us.

We have, in the course of our life's journey, pondered and worried about a solution to seemingly unsolvable problems and out of nowhere there is a voice outside of ourselves that makes everything clear.

Remember Elijah had a similar experience. In I Kings 19: "And he said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the LORD. And, behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks 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: 19:12 And after the earthquake a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice."

It is that brief, unexpected moment when we "see the light", we hear a voice, when we know what to do, when we have a sense of enlightenment. When, like Eli and Samuel, we have an understanding of who we are and what we need to do.

PAUSE

I have a second story that I want to share with you.

“A very religious man was once caught in rising floodwaters. He climbed onto the roof of his house and trusted God to rescue him. A neighbor came by in a canoe and said, “The waters will soon be above your house. Hop in and we’ll paddle to safety.”

“No thanks” replied the religious man. “I’ve prayed to God and I’m sure he will save me”

A short time later the police came by in a boat. “The waters will soon be above your house. Hop in and we’ll take you to safety.”

“No thanks” replied the religious man. “I’ve prayed to God and I’m sure he will save me”

A little time later a rescue services helicopter hovered overhead, let down a rope ladder and said. “The waters will soon be above your house. Climb the ladder and we’ll fly you to safety.”

“No thanks” replied the religious man. “I’ve prayed to God and I’m sure he will save me”

All this time, the floodwaters continued to rise, until soon they reached above the roof and the religious man drowned. When he arrived at heaven, he demanded an audience with God. Ushered into God’s throne room he said, “Lord, why am I here in heaven? I prayed for you to save me, I trusted you to save me from that flood.”

“Yes you did my child” replied the Lord. “And I sent you a canoe, a boat and a helicopter. But you never got in.”

How many times have we missed the signs or chosen to ignore them all together and cry out for help or call out to God, asking why we have been forgotten? I have many favorite scriptures in the Bible. The 139th Psalm is in the top five. The author reminds us that God is aware of us from the very beginning. What we do is important to him and He is always attentive to our every thought and word. And, there is the promise that He will never leave us regardless of the straits we may find ourselves in. Never.

Today’s reading of the 139th Psalm moves from the sixth to the thirteenth verse. The following are the seventh through the tenth verses: “Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there; If I make the grave my bed, You are there. If I take the wings of the morning, And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, Even there Your hand shall lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me.” Regardless of the direction our lives may take, regardless of the pain and suffering we may have to endure, regardless of the choices that may not go as we expected, regardless of where our journey may take us, God is with us, speaking to us, trying to get our attention.

Frederick Buechner puts it this way: “IF GOD SPEAKS anywhere, it is into our personal lives that he speaks. Someone we love dies, say. Some unforeseen act of kindness or cruelty touches the heart or makes the blood run cold. We fail a friend, or a friend fails us, and we are appalled at the capacity we all of us have for estranging the very people in our lives we need the most. Or maybe nothing extraordinary happens at all—just one day following another,

helter-skelter, in the manner of days. We sleep and dream. We wake. We work. We remember and forget. We have fun and are depressed. And into the thick of it, or out of the thick of it, at moments of even the most humdrum of our days, God speaks.”

Last week, we celebrated the baptism of Jesus and recalled our own. In the Baptismal Covenant, there are questions put to us and the assigned tasks are daunting: Will you persevere? Will you proclaim? Will you seek and serve? Will you strive? Think of the responsibility we all would have to bear if we responded with just: “I will”. No one is capable of doing this alone. We are incapable of existing without God in our midst. God has named us and loves us, all of us, unconditionally and speaks to us and acts for us; and so we respond to the Baptismal Covenant questions, not with: “I will...but with: **I will with God’s help!**” There is no place that we can flee to or no condition so severe or times so troubling, that we are left all alone. It is just up to us to listen and be attentive to God’s call.

The following is referred to as the Frankfurt prayer. Let us pray: “O Lord, the Scripture says “there is a time for silence and a time for speech.” Lord, teach us the silence of humility, the silence of wisdom, the silence of love, the silence of perfection, the silence that speaks without words, the silence of faith.

“Lord, teach us to silence our own hearts that we may listen to the gentle movement of the Holy Spirit within us and sense the depths which are of God.”

Amen