

The Bible is full of stories about people hearing voices. (Have you ever thought about it that way?)

How else did Abraham or Jacob or Joseph know what to do next? Or how did Jeremiah, Isaiah, or Micah know what to say? Without hearing voices how would Elizabeth or Mary know how to deal with the surprises they faced? The list goes on and on. Do you think such a voice ever can be heard today?

None of us would tell the world, "I hear voices." Is there something about the world in which we live that such a situation would bring concern rather than attention and response? Would this be a cause of concern or fear that someone had gone over the edge? What it demand medication?

Joan of Arc heard a voice and she became a folk hero. Martin Luther listened to God rather than the Pope as he was guided by the powerful voice of Scripture. J.R.R. Tolkien wrote incredible fantasies of fiction that were filled with the reality of sin and death and the rescue that only God can bring, and said that as he wrote, he felt that someone else was putting words on the page.

So how is it for you ... do you hear voices? Are you guided by prayer and the inspiration of God's presence in your midst, or is your world silent?

This passage from Samuel is a wonderful text that begins with an editorial commentary about the sacred place of worship where Eli was a priest of the God of Israel. It stated that Eli's eyes were failing, he was surrounded by darkness, and there were no visions anymore at that time. God seemed silent!

No visions means no roadmaps for the faithful. And the priest's failing eyesight and deafness meant no one was hearing the voice of God. This text begins with a powerful image of a world that had lost a sense of the holy and couldn't see or hear God even if he was in their midst.

How often have we felt or heard others ask, "Why doesn't God speak today like he did in the good old days of the Old Testament? How come no one hears God speak like Joshua or Moses, or David?"

Can we relate? Does God seem silent? Are miracles and signs diminished? Or are we maybe just blinded by other lights, and busy with other voices?

Has our eyesight grown dim, and our hearing gone away for reasons other than that of aging? Martin Luther King was guided by the powerful witness of scripture to share God's words of forgiving and servant love for all, and yet his voice was silenced by those who couldn't or wouldn't hear the voice of God!

God is clearly the author of life, the owner of life, the power behind life.

And yet the law permits us to end life in the womb or before it is ready for the tomb. People murder neighbors or strangers with callous disregard. Wars are fought with the drones, so combatants don't see the effaces of those they kill.

It has become commonplace to destroy the reputations and business of people who might have a different perspective or view on faith. Everyone listens to voices, on television, the internet, or a myriad of social platforms. For some reason, such disembodied voices often carry more power and influence than the still small voice of God we can clearly hear in our prayers or study of Scripture.

Maybe the real question should be: "Is my faith and prayer life so full of the noises of the world, or my own noises, that I have no quiet in which to hear God?"

The story of Samuel would indicate that God was still speaking, it was only the deafness and blindness of the priest Eli that was unable to hear. Hanna (Samuel's mother) listened after she spoke her prayers and responded with the same voice she so clearly heard. She dedicated her child to God's service.

When we are open to God, the miracle is that we realize He speaks clearly and often. His voice has always been there and always been clear but if we don't listen or close our eyes or follow other voices we might think God doesn't speak but like Eli, it is our problem that gets in the way.

When we empty ourselves of me and instead allow God to fill the body and mind and energy of my life that he has created, we are more able to respond with faith. And we get more accustomed to celebrating that God not only speaks but enables his vision to be shred "even through me!"

Years after graduating from medical school, a man named Paul Tournier (tor nE A) began to celebrate his faith by writing. He became well known and read by many. One day he went back to his medical school to read a passage about faith to his favorite professor. As he finished the old man had tears, saying, "What a wonderful book! Every one of us Christians should read your book!" This surprised Tournier who asked, "When did you become a Christian?"

The old man answered, "When I read your book!"

Because Tournier was not afraid to share his faith, God worked through his words to share a vision with someone who had never heard that word before. That is how God speaks, clearly, loudly, often.

What if disciples hadn't looked into empty tomb? What if they had seen but not told anyone that the tomb was empty? Doesn't that have something to teach us?

When someone says, "I hurt?" do you respond or hide? When you can see someone is alone or afraid, do you abandon them in the silence or seek an opportunity to be the voice of God through your willingness to wash feet?

How sad when God's voice is silent because his children won't talk. How unfortunate when God's visions are rare because his children won't love.

When I was hospitalized many years ago, I had several when I was so sick, I didn't want visitors at all. I couldn't read or watch TV. I was so sick all I could do was be alone. And yet in that silence, I gradually used that time to reflect and pray and remember what I had been too busy before my illness to take time for.

It is like my early morning walks. Even attached to the leash of our dog, it is so dark and quiet that I find it easier to watch and listen and pray. And when that time is over, I quickly feel the noise and lights and busyness around me drowning out what is so clear to hear when all is quiet.

Years ago, I started spending one morning of the week in silence (for prayer, study, writing, to better hear God.) Some criticized me for wasting time that way, and not being more productive. But if God's voice is drowned out for me, I am useless for me and for anyone else. And each of you know how that works for you as well. How quiet time, reflective time, and those quiet conversations with God bring change to the other busy and noisy times of your lives.

God speaks daily! In scripture, sunsets, communion, loving embrace, baptism, music, prayer, feeding the hungry, and in prayer. We are surrounded by voices, which will you listen to? What will flavor your living? What will your voice be?

In one of his books, Paul Tournier wrote this line: "Nothing makes us so lonely as our secrets." Like Samuel and disciples of Jesus, we not only have to find time to listen, but we then need to share what we have heard. And we share not simply by repeating words, but by living with the power those words share.

Don't be afraid of silence, for that is where you might hear God most clearly, if you listen. And don't keep silent when you have heard what God calls you to share. The world is a noisy place, but those noises can all be silenced the awesome quiet of an empty tomb.

Our mission of being faithful is always helped when we remember to take quiet time to listen to God speaking, and then respond simply by saying, "Here I am. Now I am ready. Send me!"

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