

Has God spoken to you? Have you heard God speak? After Jesus was baptized, a voice in the heavens said, "This is my son in whom I am well pleased." The gospels do not say if the voice was heard by everyone. Did only Jesus hear it, then tell the disciples; hence it was written down? Or, did everyone present hear the voice? Joan of Arc was martyred, killed as a witch, because she claimed to hear God speaking to her. The king of France said to her in exasperation, "Oh, your voices, your voices! Why don't I hear any voices?" And the condemned woman replied, "You would, if you listened."

Have you heard the voice of God speaking to you? Many folks long to hear God speak. They would like the certainty, the assurance, they are in touch with God. Perhaps they are listening in the wrong places. Perhaps they are not listening when God speaks. Perhaps they do not realize God is speaking to them. Like a youth, when mother finally gets his attention by screaming, "I'm talking to you," he replies, "Oh, I didn't hear you." Mother-deaf, we call it. Some husbands are wife-deaf. The police chief asked his officers,

"Couldn't you get that crook to confess to the crime?"

"We tried everything, sir. We browbeat and badgered him with every question we could think of."

"How did he respond?"

"He just dozed off and said now and then: 'Yes, dear. You are perfectly right.'"

Of course, the reverse is often the case. The policeman asked, "How did this accident happen?"

The driver replied, "My wife fell asleep in the back seat."

Some children are mother-deaf. Some husbands are wife-deaf. Some employees are boss-deaf. We tend to hear what we want to hear, and shut out what we don't want to hear. Perhaps some of you are God-deaf. God talks and talks, speaks and speaks, and when God finally breaks through and gets our attention, we naively, innocently reply, "Oh, were you speaking to me?"

I suspect that God talks to you a great deal. If you claim that you have not heard God speaking to you, perhaps you are God-deaf, oblivious to what is said to you, unaware of your surroundings, got your head buried in a pillow, your mind on the t-v, your attention miles away in a daydream, and don't hear what is around you. I submit to you this morning that God indeed speaks to you. I will make the assertion that God speaks regularly to everyone in this sanctuary, and those who have ears to hear will hear.

How does God speak? With what voice? In what language? God speaks in many ways. This morning, let's look at three.

First, according to the Bible and the experiences of many people throughout history, God speaks in an audible voice, sometimes heard as if another person is speaking, sometimes heard inside the head or heart. Sometimes the voice only speaks once. Sometimes the voice persists. Fifty years ago, in 1937, a young woman in Georgia won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction for the one and only book she wrote in her life, a book she called Another Day. Her name is Margaret Marsh and she wrote her prize-winning novel because she heard voices. Margaret had a reverence for the Old South traditions and legends. The voice within her told her she must help people remember that way of life which had all but disappeared and would be forever

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lost to future generations if it weren't put down in a book. One day the voice became so strong that she said out loud, "Oh, my God, now I've got to write that novel." She decided she would write a story of a girl who was somewhat like Atlanta--part of the Old South; part of the new South; how she rose with Atlanta and fell with it, and how she rose again.

It took Margaret Marsh ten years of often interrupted work to complete her book, years in which her enormous manuscript collected in odd corners of the small apartment she shared with her husband, John Marsh. For a time the manuscript was even used to prop up a collapsing sofa. That it was even published is a wonder. When a Macmillan agent visited Atlanta and asked to see her novel, Margaret refused. But at the last minute she changed her mind and raced down to the train station with a suitcase twice her size, in time to give it to the surprised agent before he boarded. The publisher didn't like the title Another Day so Margaret changed it four times until eventually the title became what we know it today, Gone With the Wind, published under a pseudonym, Margaret Mitchell. Today there are few Americans who have not read the book or seen the movie, and know the story of the Old South which was written because a shy young woman in Atlanta responded to a "voice."

Secondly, God often speaks to you through other people. In the Bible, God sent prophets to speak on his behalf. God today often speaks through others, through their voices, or through their lives. When you are sensitive and open, you can often hear God speaking directly to you. Sometimes you seek out someone--a friend, counselor or minister--and share a problem or a concern. Through the sharing, you will often hear God speaking.

Sometimes you will be surprised how the voice of God comes to you. A four-year-old boy was dying of leukemia. Nothing could be done. One day he and his mother stopped by his father's office. While the parents were talking, the boy jumped on the secretary's lap and said, "I won't be coming around here much longer." "Oh," she said, "why not?" "Because I'm going to go to heaven soon." How would you have responded? Shocked? Changed the subject? Disagreed with the boy by saying, "Oh, don't talk like that; you are going to be fine?" Not the secretary. She realized she was hearing God speak, so she gave the boy a hug and said, "That's great. Tell Jesus hello for me." God spoke a loud word of faith and hope to the secretary through a little boy who looked on death as an adventure. The secretary heard what the little boy was saying, responded appropriately, and entered the presence of God.

Not only can you often hear God speaking to you through other people, but God can use you to speak to other people. You can be a prophet, speaking on God's behalf. You can be the channel of God's voice. We received a Christmas greeting from Dennis and Mary Ellen, former parishioners in Minneapolis. Even though Dennis was relatively young--only in his 50s--he had a stroke and for the past five years was confined to his home. He died in October and the day before he died, composed this poem for their Christmas greeting.

Joy to the world, the Lord is come.  
My joy rests in having you for my friend;  
And although you may not fell me  
with an overabundance of attention,  
Still I rejoice in just knowing  
that you are out there some place.



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Jesus says it best with  
"Love one another, for love is of God."

I do, It is for keeps.

The next day, after writing this, he died. Did you hear the loneliness? "My joy rests in having you for my friend; and although you may not feel me with an overabundance of attention..." I wonder how many times a friend thought, "I should call Dennis," but didn't take the time. I wonder how many times someone thought, "I should stop and say 'hi' to Dennis," but didn't.

It's a strange phenomenon, but often when people become ill and are confined to their home or a nursing home, their friends, including their church friends, forget them. I wonder if some people feel uncomfortable around sick folks and so they stay away. In a former church, a widow was really bitter. She said her husband had been a faithful member of the Methodist Men's Club for years. Then he became bed-ridden for seven years, until he died. And, she said, "No one from the Men's Club ever visited him." If we are too busy to express love and caring, we are too busy!

All you have is time. Are there some friends or family you know are lonely, and whose day would be made if this afternoon you picked up the phone and called them, if you "reached out and touched someone?" Make some calls to your parents, grandparents, or friends today and say, "Just thinking about you. How are you?" Be the voice of God today. And, don't wait until you go home. There are many here this morning who are lonely, who need you to be God's voice and ask, "How are you?" Invite someone to lunch.

One of our new members told me this week they have been in Palo Alto one year now, and have no friends. Have you old-timers forgotten what it's like to move to a new, strange community, far from family and friends? If you feel lonely yourself, reach out to someone else, be God's voice, and you'll forget your own loneliness. The major goal of our church this year is to establish small groups throughout our congregation where you can find friends, put down some roots, share your lives with one another, grow together in your spiritual lives, and participate in a community of love. Here on the peninsula, we live in an area of intense activity, stress and loneliness. God speaks through people to you. God speaks to people through you.

A third way in which God speaks is through the Bible, the Word of God. Therefore, I confidently say to you that God speaks to you regularly. When you read the Bible, when you hear it read here in the worship service, and when you hear it preached (and I believe the Bible is preached faithfully here in this church), God is speaking to you. Too many of us take the Bible for granted. It has been part of our lives since childhood. Few of us read and study it diligently. We act as if we have exhausted its resources.

Two goats found a tin can full of film. One of them nuzzled it until the lid came off. The first goat ate a few frames. The second goat ate some too. Soon they pulled all the film off the reel and devoured it. The first goat said, "Wasn't that great?" "Oh, I don't know," replied the second goat. "I thought the book was better." The book is better. Even in a world of constant stimulation and excitement from movies, television, videos, records, discs, and tapes, the Bible is still the most fascinating and satisfying because it feeds the soul. The Bible is the word of God, God speaking to you. The message of the Bible will never grow old or stale. If you only

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half-listen when it is read or preached, if you have ceased to read the Bible by yourself, if you are not active in Bible study, you are shutting your ears to God. You become God-deaf.

God speaks in many ways, including inner and outer voices, through people and the Bible. God speaks to you often. You who have ears to hear, listen. How can you hear God speaking to you if you are not listening?