Sermon Text for August 18, 2013

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Exodus 7:1-7, John 12:36b-43

“God is trying to tell you something”

 It is great to be back in the pulpit after a week away. I feel like now the whole year is stretching ahead in front of us. I am so excited for the work that God will continue and bring to completion this year. We were in Myrtle Beach, no golf, 20 people in one house, 10 of them children, all Bronkema cousins between the ages of 7 and 17. Every single one of those kids had an electronic device where they were either playing games or reading books or doing both at the same time. Probably the low moment of the week was the first night when all the girl cousins forced everyone else to watch the final episode of Bachelorette. It was really painful.

 We had a great time, but it is always nice to get back. We’ve had back to back to back weddings and it has been so much fun to be a part of all of their stories and to see how God has brought these couples together and for the most part they are able to acknowledge God’s hand in their matchmaking.

 Bob Weaver passed away yesterday. After months of medical and pharmaceutical confusion and overload they asked for a sign last week in order to get some direction and advice. He played cards with Norma and friends Friday night and died peacefully Saturday. What was God trying to say? It is time? The sign of a nephew who is the first responder who wasn’t supposed to be on shift who was able to be with his aunt in the immediate, raw, moment of grief? I’ve been with you all along, God was saying, and I will never leave your or forsake you.

 But we don’t always hear God trying to tell us something. In our Gospel of John reading the author gives us the primary reason for why that might be. Let’s go ahead and read John 12.

One of my favorite scenes of all time which shows us that the voice of God comes to everyone. Everyone. When the preacher is preaching the party on the pond continues, but it isn’t until they start singing that the preacher’s daughter’s attention is grabbed. When she hugs her daddy and says even sinner have a song, her dad almost reluctantly at first, but then completely, hugs her back.

 It took the singing in order for the sinner to hear that God is trying to tell her something and for each one of us there could be a different medium if not singing then preaching, then caring, or acts of love or charity, a gentle touch, a kind smile. Whatever it may be: God is trying to tell you something applies to all of us, but we don’t always hear what he has to say.

 In our first reading we find Pharaoh who is the only person in Egypt who was not able to hear when God was trying to tell him something. Look at 7:5 where it states that the Egyptian shall know, the Israelites shall know so that leaves us with only Pharaoh who is unaware that God is trying to tell you something.

 Have you ever been in that situation where you feel like you’re the only one not getting it? I guess if you’re Pharaoh it doesn’t matter until your firstborn is taken from you then all of a sudden things change and it becomes drastically important to understand that God is trying to tell you something.

 Our reading in John provides a clear yet convicting reason for why when God tries to tell us something either by speaking, or sending a sign, or prick our conscience, why our hearts are hindered and we simply are not able to receive what He is trying to tell us. If you look at vs. 43 the reason we are given is that we loved human glory more than the glory that comes from God. Let’s let that sink in for a moment. The reason why we may miss God’s voice to us is that, here’s another translation of that same verse: We love the honor that people give to us over the honor that God gives to us.

 We are working our way backwards through these John verses. We are beginning with the point of this passage, the take home verse which is don’t love what people can give you over what God has already given to you in Jesus Christ. Let’s unwrap this concept starting back at the beginning of our passage.

 In verse 36b we find Jesus after riding into Jerusalem in triumph and giving a last teaching on him being glorified, he had to go and hide from those who were surrounding him. He didn’t go up to a mountain to pray by himself, he actually went and hid from people so they could not find him. My second semester in college I studied in Rome and I was walking in the market near where we stayed, in a convent, and Sting was in town and apparently when I was 21 I looked like Sting, I had a mullet, and the people in the market thought I was Sting and they swarmed me asking me for autographs, giving me salami, and fruit. Who was I to say no? I knew Italian and after a while it got tiring so I ran out of there really fast with kids trailing me. Okay, not the same, but you get the point.

 The following verses are then a type of reflection of where we are in the Gospel of John, after all that has happened. We are in the last week of Jesus’ life so it is good to take inventory, see how effective his ministry was and just kind of lay things out. We read in 37 the recognition that even though he had performed signs many still did not believe.

 What were the signs that Jesus performed in John? That is another word for miracle, do you remember that? There are 6 miracles in John that we have covered over these 2 years, let’s see if you can name at least 3 of them. Water to wine- 2:11, healing of official’s son – 4:46-54, paralytic in Bethsaida 5:1-18, feeding of the 5,000 – 6:5-14, Jesus walks on water – 6:16-24, healing of the blind man – 9:17, Lazarus- 11:1-45.

 Those are all sings. Those are all attempts at God trying to tell us something. I am in control of heaven and earth and Jesus is my son with whom I am well pleased, believe I him as the way the truth and the life and you will have eternal life. The purpose of a miracle is not just for its result but for its message. It is a mouth piece for God as we see that God is indeed trying to tell us something, constantly.

 Any one of these signs would have worked for anyone of us, right? But we read that they did not believe in him. That is clarified in vs. 42 by you know many actually did believe, even the authorities, but they didn’t want anyone to know because they were afraid they would be tossed out of the church. It’s too bad, because they lost their chance. The next time they are going to see Jesus publicly is on the cross in his glory, the type of glory they fear and our God craves. God has been trying to tell them something all this time, but now he goes and hides and they are left with the thought that maybe the honor they can receive from people is more important and is better than the honor they can receive from the Creator.

 Every single one of us has had miracles in our lives. We have all received signs, times when God was trying to tell us something and at least briefly for a moment we get it. Right? Haven’t we all had a moment when we pray for a child and God responds in a powerful, unexpected way. We’ve had experiences where God has healed, where God has told us something through a miracle we never expected. You know, some here believed, they heard what God had to say, even those with the most to lose.

 You have all shared with me so many miracles that you experienced, sometimes around a tragedy, other times in answered prayer unexpectedly that you have made my heart sing. But what happens over time? We experience our sign, hear it, but then the exigencies, the needs of this world, life keeps moving forward

 And we either forget or put it in the realm as a one time freak happening. God’s sign goes from being the norm and God is trying to tell us something about how we ought to live to a great little experience in the midst of a whirlwind of other things happening around us so it gets lost.

 No one consciously says: I’m going to trade God’s glory for human glory. But we all allow God’s voice to be edged out by a life and a world which would have us focus on retirement, and money, and things, and remodeled kitchens, and vacations, and kids… and so on. So all of a sudden the new normal is that your priorities better be what your plans are for your future as opposed to what is God trying to tell you about you present which will alter your future to mimic his desires in your life.

 Some read these verses and see sheer determinism because God is given the credit for the hardening of heart. But in Pharaoh’s case the people got it, he chose not to. In John many get it but rejected it for fear of having to sacrifice too much in the life that they know and love. God is trying to tell us something, we just have to be willing to give up what we think is normal in order to hear and pursue it.

 I remember when I was interviewing at churches and various committees would ask me what church growth model did I sue and I had no idea what they were talking about. They would talk about all sorts of different models and my only response was, I have no idea what I’m doing. I just try to listen to what God is saying to me and listen to those that I know are trying to hear God’s voice and then make decisions based on that.

 I have no strategy from a book. I’m relying upon you to pray without ceasing so that you can hear what God is trying to tell this church body. But we can easily miss what God is trying to tell us when we value too much the favor of those around us or even the current thinking that takes us away from God’s Word. Because God’s desire for our lives is so very different from what the rest of the world wants for you.

 I pray that we would all be able to hear what God is trying to tell us as we face a new year of challenge and work in God’s grace. Amen.