

Sermon Text for May 19, 2024

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

Joel 2:28-29 and Matthew 10:16-23

“The Spirit of God speaks for us”

On this Pentecost Sunday we are going to focus on what it means to hear the voice of God. As someone who has professed to clearly hear the voice of God and to following God’s directives for my future upon hearing God’s voice, I want you to ask yourself if and when you have heard the voice of God. Andrew Root a professor at Luther Seminary in Chicago told of a study that they did at the seminary where they asked a random sampling of people if they had heard the voice of God. It was in an interview format and he said he would never forget this one lawyer that they interviewed and when they came to the question of did you hear the voice of God she originally said no and then she told them a story that had taken place nearly 20 years ago.

She was newly married and her husband had gone to London for a conference for his work. She received a phone call the next day and the voice on the phone said that her husband had been found dead of a heartattack in his hotel room. Would you be able to come and identify the body and make arrangements. She said that all those next few days were a blur of making arrangements, getting plane tickets, hotel rooms, setting up a way to get the body back to the states. She landed in the morning and got an Uber and on the way over the driver and her talked and she shared why she was there.

He drove her to the morgue and she went inside, stunned, not sure what to do or where to go. They led her down a hallway to the body of her husband in the morgue and she said at that moment she felt paralyzed, unable to move or speak or do anything at all, and she felt like she stayed like that for hours, until she felt an arm gently holding her, and she turned around and it was the uber driver who had come inside. She said that was when I felt and heard the voice of God telling me that I was going to make it through this, I was, but not alone.

Andrew Root tracked down that Uber driver and the story he tells is that once he dropped off the lawyer at the morgue he audibly heard a voice that he can only attribute to God telling him to go with her and be by her side. Hearing God’s voice comes in many different forms and functions and sometimes we hear it and sometimes we are that voice that reminds people of God’s presence and comfort and direction in their lives.

This day of Pentecost we celebrate the birthday of the church and God giving us the greatest present we could ever receive, His actual presence in the form of the Holy Spirit. We

will see today that today probably more than any other time in each of our collective lives we need to both hear the voice of God and be willing to speak with the voice that God provides us so that we are able to live our this life of righteousness which we have been called to live. Let's read.

READ

I hope you were shocked by the messiness of this last Scripture that we read. This Scripture, and really so many Scriptures that we read describe a certain messiness that is involved in being a disciple of Jesus Christ. If you are in this in order to keep your hands clean then being a follower of Jesus just may not be for you. In Acts 2 when we read about the story of Pentecost, and this year we are not reading it because we find ourselves in Matthew, but in Acts 2 on the day of Pentecost we read that they were all in one place and that place was in a house when the Holy Spirit descended upon them and they were filled with the Holy Spirit.

The moment before the Holy Spirit came how do you suppose the disciples were feeling? We know how they were feeling from when Peter is released from prison and they don't let him in the gate because they are gathered in the house afraid. This is the same, they are gathered in the house afraid, anxious, filled with worry. Anxiety and worry are the result of not knowing what the future might hold. Over and over again Jesus speaks about worry, asking us in Matthew 5-7 on the sermon on the Mount, why do you worry? But in that house that anxiety and worry were a result of not knowing what the future would hold for the disciples. What will the future look like for this movement without the physical presence of Jesus, that caused the disciples of the 1st century anxiety and worry.

This Scripture addresses directly the anxiety about what are we to say when we are asked to defend our stance on who God is in our lives? Do not worry, God will give you the words. Joel similarly says that God will send His Spirit upon all creation, he will pour it out, and everyone will be filled and be able to speak the words of God. Now the emphasis here is on speaking God's words but the disciples may not have had that on the top of their list. I'm guessing you didn't come here today to learn how to speak about God to people that you know. Maybe some of you have, but I'm guessing most of you are here to hear and feel the presence of God and allow that to be with you as you live your life.

But the Scripture here in Matthew is all within the context of a mess that is happening in the society and culture. People are turning against each other, brother against brother, go through the list and tell me how you feel about this. Matthew says when you are in this situation I will give you the words to say.

The clashes of culture that this Scripture lays out in Matthew are shocking and disturbing. But they are common in Scripture when they describe the end times that are coming. Look at Micah 7:6, and then even later in Matthew we see really similar wording. It doesn't mean at all that we have to turn our backs on our families, but we have seen even in our own lives how the political mess that is our country is turning people who know each other and love each other and even families against each other. Maybe not to the point of death which Matthew says, but this is the first century, people were more willing to kill family members as a matter of principle.

The divisions of the family in general is an apocalyptic commonplace in Scripture. But it describes exactly the opposite of what happens on the day of Pentecost when different culture and different people are drawn together because of the gift of the Holy Spirit which allows them to bridge the chasms that had been present. God's command to us on this day of Pentecost is not to sow division, but rather to bring people together, to speak with God's voice in a way that reflects the righteousness with which he calls us to live. The tension between religious commitment and family obligations has always been a part of Christian history.

So what does a 21st century Pentecost look like, what does it look like in our nation, what does it look like here at First Presbyterian? Joel in vs.29 says "In those days", folks we are in those days. We are in the days that God is moving and is looking for people who will live righteously, according to his will, and not just pursue what culture and society tell us are the most important things in life. A 21st century Pentecost needs to be a counter-cultural church whose emphasis is on preaching and teaching Jesus without the cultural baggage that we have added to it.

Today Steve Hess and I, Steve is representing you as an elder on Mission and Finance, we are going to Shiloh Presbyterian Church in Oxford, PA. Shiloh is a historically black congregation that even since its inception was faced with persecution. When it was founded the members had wanted to be called Shiloh but this Presbytery refused to allow it to be called that because black churches were called Second Presbyterian, and that was the name that it was given. Only within the last decade did it have its name changed to the name that it had wanted all along.

Last year your session voted to donate \$50,000 to Shiloh to help them pay off their mortgage on their family life building. With this help and the help of others within our Presbytery they were able to pay it off and today they have a celebration where they are going to burn the mortgage. So much of what we believe as Christians is built upon our understanding of

the norm as white men and women moving in a culture and society that was created by white men and women and which excluded those who were not like us.

Similarly, our theology is built on the backs of early 20th century German thought. Our goal is not to create a Christian culture around us in this nation or in this world, but rather followers, each with their own culture and their background as children of God. When I asked you earlier to identify when and how and where you were when you heard God's voice, today I want you to hear God's voice which points to a future in your life which is a future of righteousness which often conflicts with culture's voice that points to a future of greed and dominance and protecting what we have.

What we see and feel in culture is not real. We are told to be afraid of certain things which actually reflected a justice and righteousness that God has inspired and which demonstrates a love for all people and the fact that God has poured out his Holy Spirit on all people, and not just on people like us. We are wired to be fearful in ways that do not make sense. When I was living in Florida they had these monster sized Palmetto bugs, and they would make it into your house, and they would fly around. When you see them flying around your house you are terrified even though they can't hurt you. But your body tells you to recoil and so you do, for no good reason. We feel like these bugs are going to kill us and our body tells us to run in fear, same with a mouse. Feelings do not always reflect reality and truth and people, our feelings is how people are manipulating us to do things that do not track with God's kingdom.

When we hear the voice of culture and replace God's voice with it then we end up pursuing that which clashes God's desires for our lives. Jesus commands his disciples to go out as sheep among wolves. Isaiah 11:6 speaks about the wolf lying with the lamb as an image of the kingdom of God is at hand. Jesus tells us to be wise as serpents, which we see in Genesis 3 the serpent which is wise as his primary descriptive feature.

Pentecost in the 21st century has to be marked by people who are willing to live lives not of anxiety and worry, but rather confident that their Savior has their future in their hands. Kierkegaard said life is to be lived forward but it is to be understood backward. When we focus on the past then we remain paralyzed. When we worry about the future then our anxiety wins out. Let's hear God's word to us today which encourages us to live our lives forward while being shaped from those who went before us. Amen.