

## **A Variety of Voices**

**I Kings 19:1-4, 8-15; Galatians 3:23-29; Luke 8:26-39; Psalm 5:1-8, 6-17-07**

All of us speak our way through life in a variety of voices. Have you ever thought about this? In the course of one day we may be happy, angry, in despair, scared, disgusted, loving. As our emotions run the gamut of expression so do our voices. We all know we use a different voice when talking to a baby than we do when talking to a boss or to a spouse or to a rebellious teenager. And sometimes, when we speak to someone, we can hear the change in his or her voice as he or she moves from one topic of conversation to another. If you haven't noticed this, try listening a little more closely to others. We can often sense where they are coming from by the tone of their voices.

In this morning's scripture readings we heard a wide variety of voices. In one instance we learned that God did not speak to Elijah in the wind, the earthquake, or the fire. God's voice came out of silence or in other, more familiar translations, there was a "still, small voice." Sometimes in new versions of the Bible too much effort is made to take us back to precisely what was or may have been written and we lose much of the poetry of earlier translations. So, let us think that it was "a still small voice" that addressed Elijah and that it gave him new direction that helped him see through his fear and go on with life.

Very often in life, we are told, we find God in the pauses, in the stillness, in times of meditation, in times when we finally slow down and take account of our lives and, in peace, find an answer. When we are busy running in all directions at once and fearful of what lies before us we cannot hear any "still small voice" that might give us direction. When we are forced to pause and calm our senseless anxieties we often find the answer. We only need be still and know that God is God and we are not. We need to stop, look and listen when we feel dreadfully lost.

Jesus stopped the Gerasene demoniac in his tracks. The demon in the man who approached him knew Jesus and his strength. It was fearful of what would happen to it if sent into the abyss—the place God's enemies dwelt. So, instead Jesus sent the Legion of demons into a herd of swine and they plunged over a cliff, fell into a river and were drowned. Drowning was a traditional way of getting rid of demons. As I thought of this, I thought of the witch trials conducted in this country and in other places. Often people were drowned to make certain they were gone forever as were the demons that possessed them.

We can imagine that Jesus did not use a soft gentle voice when he ordered the demons from the poor tormented man. A gentle voice was not in order. But, when people came to check out this miracle of healing, they found the man and Jesus sitting together and, most likely talking quietly. Jesus could not stay with the man and told him to go about and tell people what God had done for him. People would listen to the man who had been so changed and who came to them with a new voice and a new message of hope.

Paul's voice rings out loud and clear in his Letter to the Galatians. There was not just one church in Galatia, but many. This letter probably circulated through the churches. It addressed a problem those early churches faced. There were some other Christian missionaries working the territory who believed that Gentiles had to become Jews as they

moved along the pathway of conversion. Paul did not believe this. So, we have his powerful statement of just whom it is that can belong to Christ.

I remember during my vicinage council before my ordination being asked what my favorite scripture was. This is a tough question because most seminary graduates have many favorite scriptures. Several of them flashed through my mind in a few seconds. The scripture that came from my lips was this one: "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." I was surprised when I heard myself speaking those words. But I knew that I believed in the universality of the message of the Good News and that this reading best exemplified the gospel for me.

Paul's voice in this portion of his letter was firm and directive---it was meant to guide the churches in which it was read on a pathway of acceptance and growth. These words were inclusive and intended to welcome all and not shut out anyone. They were broad enough to allow everyone a place in the fledgling movement.

In other places Paul's voice is less inviting. But we need to remember that each of his letters was designed to address a problem in the particular church he wrote to, in a particular place and at a particular time. The problems differed from place to place so his voice, the tone of his writing, changed with them. He must have been a man who could think on his feet and adapt rapidly to what he sensed was going on around him.

We need to take a clue from the voices we encounter in the Bible. Sometimes soft and other times harsh, sometimes accepting, other times directing but always adapting to the situation with which people were confronted. To adapt and use the best voice possible to further our cause, we need to be able to slow ourselves down and listen to what is going on. We need to hear beyond the surface to all the fears, concerns and hopes another may be trying to express to us. We need to process words and feelings before we exercise our variety of voices instead of reacting to what it is we think we hear.

Now, this is Father's Day, a day on which we honor our fathers. Our fathers have a variety of voices and we fully understand, when we reach a reasonable age, the meaning of their tone. Fathers can support or tear down a child, just as mothers can, if they react too quickly to what they think they see and hear. The role of any parent is to guide their children and help them find their way in life. We all live according to the patterns we have learned in life. We cannot avoid the way our parents have raised us. But, if the patterns have not been positive, we have the choice to change and not just fall into the same old way of doing things. We have the choice to pause and listen for that still small voice of guidance that comes to us in so many ways throughout our lives. Sometimes we hear it in fear, sometimes in strength, sometimes in happiness, sometimes in sadness. But no matter what state we may find ourselves in, that voice is always there, around us and within us prodding us forward and aiming us in the right direction. It is up to us to discern it, embrace it and to follow it.

Amen