

Sermon 7 October 2018
Job 1:1, 2:1-10; Hebrews 1:1-4, 2:5-12; Mark 10:2-16

*Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets,
but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son . . .*

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One of the things we hope for when we come to church is to hear from God. We listen as the scriptures are read. Before the reading we pray a prayer of illumination—with different words each week we ask God to speak to us, to bring light to our minds, to plant seeds of understanding and knowledge that can grow into wisdom. After the reading we sing of God’s Word as a lamp and as light for our journey through darkness and ignorance.

We listen for God to speak in the sermon. More than a speech or lesson, we hope for a moment of inspiration, a work of the Spirit reaching into our minds and hearts to energize and change our lives. Was it last Sunday that a few of us learned or re-learned how to use CPR and the defibrillator to restart the heart of a victim of cardiac arrest? Sometimes the Word of God comes to us like a revitalizing defibrillator shock, metaphorically restarting our hearts to pump *wonder* and vitality back into our days. We say God *spoke* the whole of creation into existence. God said, “*Let there be light, and there was light.*” God spoke and there was a creative “big bang” that still reverberates through all space and time.

The writer of Hebrews confessed: *In these last days God has spoken to us through a Son.* The Son spoke to crowds on the hillside, on the street, in the market square, in the synagogue; he spoke quietly to his closest friends in simple homes and in lonely places. He spoke with words and he spoke with actions. He spoke as he touched a man born blind, a woman tormented with a chronic disease; he spoke to his disciples in the silent hours of his prayers. He spoke when he took a child onto his lap. The Son still speaks to us in countless ways.

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This morning we celebrated the two *sacraments* recognized by the Protestant Church—baptism and Holy Communion. The Roman Catholic Church has five more sacraments: confirmation, penance, anointing of the sick, ordination, and marriage. What is a sacrament? The classic definition says a sacrament is *an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace*. A sacrament is an open channel for hearing and recognizing the Presence of God. Sacraments communicate with us at our deepest levels—conscious and unconscious.

Our experience of the power of a sacrament usually defies explanation. Anything we try to say about a real encounter with sacrament pales at the experience—we stammer to speak about the immediate experience of God’s loving presence. In the living presence of God we have little if anything to say. I see your faces when you come forward for communion and I know the most important of what happens to us here is beyond words—yet God speaks.

God speaks to us in the sacraments we formally recognize. But God speaks in many more ways. God speaks to us in creation—certainly in the beauty of the world, but also in places where the earth has been violated by greed and violence. God speaks words of glory and joy, *and* God speaks desolate, sad words. In the world around us God speaks unconditional love and God speaks redemptive judgment.

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Jesus, the Son, the living Word, speaks to us in many ways. One of the most impactful ways he speaks is through our personal stories of grace and doubt, struggle and loss, persistence, blessing and faith—the stories we share with each other. Each of us has a library of stories to share about the minutes, days and years of our lives—and the Holy Spirit stands ready to infuse those stories with wisdom even as she uses them as lifelines of salvation for the lost.

A number of you spoke to me about the service Barbara Meese led while I was away one Sunday. One of you was especially moved and inspired by what he heard and what he sensed in that service. He felt a palpable yearning among you to tell your story. That is a godly yearning.

In his second letter to the church in Corinth Paul tells the people that they are living letters from God. *You weren't written with ink but with the Spirit of the living God. You weren't written on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.* Biblical archeologists search the world for extant copies of early writings of the Church. That is not a bad thing to do, but the words of God are waiting to be read everywhere in the stories of people like you and me.

One of the books I read many years ago said that the human heart struggles with conflicting desires. The writer spoke of the most intimate and important things we have experienced. He said that there is in the heart a desire to *reveal* and a desire to *conceal*. Many of us want to tell our stories, but we are reluctant. Some of us are introverts; we struggle with a tangible fear of standing out in public. I've read that the number one fear in our society is not a fear of heights or closed spaces, or a fear of snakes or spiders; the number one fear is the fear of speaking in public. Some feel that they simply have nothing significant to share. Whoever thinks their story is not worth sharing is mistaken, and we all are deprived by their silence. Never underestimate the power of God speaking through a man or woman.

Jesus told the simplest of stories to expose the most wonderful of truths; he told simple stories of common people and common events to reveal the wonder of existence and the permeating love of God. You and I are letters, in many cases waiting to be read aloud for our friends to hear. *We weren't written with ink but with the Spirit of the living God. We weren't written on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.*

Of course people read us all the time by what we say and do. Our acts of kindness and generosity speak volumes, but there is no substitute for hearing our simple words of faith. At my friend's encouragement and your response, we will find ways to share our stories in the future—our faith will be inspired and our lives will be enriched by what we hear from each other.

One last thought this morning about how God speaks and reveals. *Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways—and God still does.* One of the books I am rereading these days was written by

Jean-Pierre de Caussade in the first half of the eighteenth century. The title of the book tells us what to expect in its pages: *The Sacrament of the Present Moment*.

It is something we have said many times in the past years. No moment of our lives is neutral; every moment of life is filled with possibilities, including the possibility of hearing and being touched and transformed by the presence of God. In the end all life is a sacrament. We live in a God-saturated universe. *In Christ we live and move and have our being*. There is no place we can go to escape the presence of the living God.

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Several weeks ago we shared a sacramental moment in worship. I included the elements of that sacramental invitation in the September newsletter. As we follow in the light of Isabella's baptism and move toward prayer and the celebration of Holy Communion, let's take a moment to listen to the still small voice of the Spirit. Let's take a moment to open our hearts a little wider to perceive and rest in the presence of God. I ask you to repeat the phrases I speak; each phrase is followed by a moment of reflective silence; after the last word, we will share 1 1/2 minutes of contemplative silence.

From Psalm 46:

Be still and know I am God.

(Silence)

Be still and know I am.

(Silence)

Be still and know.

(Silence)

Be still.

(Silence)

Be.

(Silence)