

“Hear God’s Word”
Psalm 19; 2 Timothy 3:14-17;
Hebrews 4:12-13; Luke 6:46-49

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God speaks and creation happens. That’s a pretty powerful voice. That’s what it says in the beginning of scripture, in Genesis. God speaks and creation happens. Light and dark. Form out of the void. Earth and sky. Life. It’s amazing to think that God can speak and all that happens.

Then, at the beginning of the New Testament it talks about how the Word was with God and is God and came to be among us—a continual sense of the power of God’s word, a Word incarnate.

In many ways, the whole creation is God’s word incarnate as well. Our Psalm suggests that God can speak through what is—the firmament, the night and the day. It goes on to say it does it without words. That’s kind of a strange thing. Creation speaks the Word of God wordlessly. I think that’s a wonderful thing. Words are really just symbols we use to try to tell about something else. There’s a way in which it feels that creation speaks more directly. Maybe it’s the experience of wonder, the engagement with the beauty.

As we are walking through these different ways of thinking about spiritual disciplines, we are using the word W-O-R-S-H-I-P. We have talked about Worship and Opening ourselves to God. We have thought about Relinquishing our false selves and Sharing our lives with others. This week is about Hearing God’s word.

The one thing I will say about this book, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, is it really does a good job in a lot of the chapters, but this chapter is a little weak. It may be that it comes from a slightly different tradition where hearing God’s word isn’t as fully developed in some ways. But I would like to suggest that one of the ways we hear God’s word is through creation. We experience what I’m calling transcendent realities. That’s a big way of saying that something like beauty is immaterial. I can’t find material stuff that I can put together and make beauty. It may turn out to be beautiful beyond the stuff itself. Sometimes we say that the way things come together is beautiful. I think love is another of the things I call transcendent reality. When I experience love, it’s not the same thing as a physical experience.

So there are a lot of ways of hearing God’s word, of hearing God speak into our lives. I think there’s a wonder at the order and way of creation. There is listening to the word, which I think is God’s incarnate Word, Jesus. We can hear a lot about the Word through scripture and the way Jesus speaks into our lives. Even that only happens, at least in part, through God being present in the form of the Spirit and continuing to nudge us, to help us notice, to help us hear a word of encouragement, or perhaps a word of reproof or a word of change that’s needed.

We might also hear God's word through others. One of the things the book doesn't really address is hearing the word through preaching, which in our tradition is a big part of our spiritual discipline. We expect that God does continue to work through the exposition of the word, that is, trying to understand it together, perhaps not only in this kind of format, but in conversations.

Perhaps God's word comes to us through seeing the lives of people living out the word, by experiencing the grace of God in somebody sharing their lives with us or helping us.

Then, of course, there is Bible study, which is sometimes all we think about when we think about hearing the word. It's not that it's not important, but God's word is bigger than one way of thinking about it and allowing it to enter into our lives.

But why listen? That's where this passage from Timothy comes in. It really struck me because as I worked through it, I recognized my own needs in it. Maybe you have life all figured out, but I don't feel like I do. In fact, it feels like I keep coming up with things I need to learn more about. The first thing Timothy says is that it's good for instruction. As much as I don't want to admit it sometimes, I need that instruction. I need help in understanding, in being led, and in being reflective. I'll admit that sometimes I don't think I need any instruction. Sometimes I think I have it figured out. That's when I need the Bible for persuasion. It needs to persuade me because I don't really see it all clearly and I need the next piece that it gives me to be set straight again, to be guided.

It goes on to say it is training us in righteousness. That is, to live God's way. As we look at scripture, we recognize over and over again how it guides us to live God's way. The very central piece of that is to love God with heart, mind, soul, and strength, and our neighbor as ourselves—God's way.

Jesus invites those who have just heard him teach to recognize that you can hear what he said and you can even debate what it means, but if you're really going to hear his word, then it has to come out in your actions. It has to actually sink in. When it sinks in, it becomes the foundation of who we are. The early Christians were called the People of the Way. We become a people of God's way because we've allowed the word of God to sink in. We hear that word and we are led by it.

It may mean at times that we're in conflict with the world around us. The world around us may have other ways. This week, some people said there's an Idaho way. I think that's in conflict with God's way. God's way is a way of caring for all people. When it says to love our neighbors, it doesn't say we get to pick and choose which neighbor we get to love. It also suggests that it cares about justice. If somebody has been oppressed, then we need to overcome that. There's a lot to God's way, and Jesus invites us to let that way enter into our lives.

It's so easy in our lives to begin to look at a particular thing around us. I want to expound a little bit on that kind of thing because it can be all kinds of things. We can look for someone we think has it figured out and follow them. We can blame others because that's the way we are going to be able to change our lives. We can look to a political system as the way. We can look left; we can look right. We can look at all kinds of things as the way. It's easy to begin to think that if I could just change the politics, if I could just change the economics, if I could just change how educated everybody is, or if I could just change (put in whatever you want), salvation will come.

It says in Second Timothy, "...the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for the salvation through faith in Christ Jesus." We can put our faith in all kinds of things, but the only thing I believe that we can truly put our faith in that gives us true salvation is Jesus. That enables us to let go of everything else. Now, why would we want to let go of everything else? Well, in part it's because if I don't let go, I have a God who knows what I'm thinking about.

Generally what I'll end up doing is finding a way that benefits me. I think that humans tend to do that. We tend to find a way that will benefit me or my little group. We will disparage the other, the one who disagrees. Maybe we'll try to send them back to some other place. But God knows who we are, what's in our hearts, and that can be a scary thing. However, if we embrace it, recognize that we are laid bare before God and we can't hide all our motivations and who we are, it can also be a freeing thing. It can free us to accept God's grace. It can free us to recognize that in spite of the fact that God knows all about who we are, God still loves us.

God sent the Word, his Son, that we might have life. So, while I don't think politics or economics or right or left or whatever is our salvation, we do have a responsibility from the love of God that God has given us to try to express that love in our lives. We have a responsibility to try to express the way God would have us be and live and do what is right. We have a responsibility to live Christ's way, God's way. We have a responsibility to be a people of the way and to let that be expressed in all that we do, in whatever part of life we must deal with--and that includes politics, and economics, and our education, and our work, and our leisure, and our lives.

At the end of that Second Timothy passage, it says, "...so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient and equipped for every good work." When we hear God's word, we can't expect it to leave us alone. It's not like watching a television show that we don't pay attention to after it's done, or something that we do just for fun. When we hear God's word, there's an invitation to let it become part of who we are, foundational, and lead us on a way, proficient for every good work.

As a conclusion for this morning's conversation, I would like to use Psalm 119 as a prayer. This is from *The Message* translation. So let's pray:

We're blessed when we stay on course,
walking steadily on the road you revealed, O GOD.

We're blessed when we follow God's directions,
doing our best to find him.
That's right—we don't go off on our own;
we walk straight along the road God set.
You, GOD, prescribed the right way to live;
now you expect us to live it.
Oh, that our steps might be steady,
keeping to the course you set;
Then we'd never have any regrets
in comparing our life with your counsel.
We thank you for speaking straight from your heart;
We learn the pattern of your righteous ways.
We're going to do what you tell us to do;
don't ever walk off and leave us.
Amen.