

When soon to be parents are preparing....

Gracious God, May these words be your words of grace. Amen

When soon –to- be parents are preparing for the birth of their baby, they spend a lot of time picking out names. They go through family history looking at the names of cherished relatives, or favorite characters in books...they peel over baby names from the A – Z book...and the list goes on. It seems like a monumental task to name a child. It is also a sacred task. During the baptismal ritual we ask parents, “What name is given to this child?” Right before water is splashed all over that baby, we hear his/her name. God cherishes and calls each of us by name. As the child grows, we notice how much that child grows or doesn’t grow into his or her name. We watch how that name shapes them, making them brave, bold, shy, creative, diligent.

Have we grown into our name as Christian? Do we remember who we are and whose we are: as we sit in the car, exasperated – blowing our horn; or at lunch at a busy restaurant, irritated with the wait staff? Do we remember who we are and whose we are as we look at the culture of violence that we have sat back and participated in? Do we remember who we are as we see changes on our earth and our weather systems? Do we remember who we are when we look at extreme poverty. We shake our heads and cry, “Someone should do something about that!!”... Failing to realize as Christians, that that someone God is calling just might be us. We suffer from spiritual amnesia.

In the book, “One Hundred Years of Solitude” the town becomes struck with insomnia. The result of this is people begin to forget the names of things. So, they begin to label everything, “stake, book, wall” ...At the entrance of the town, they put up a big sign “God Exists”. Sometimes we forget who we are and we forget that God exists.

In Isaiah 43 the people have been away from their homeland for so long. Their homeland gave them their identity. They needed a huge hand-painted sign “God Exists” not at the entrance of town, BUT at the center of their souls.

In the scripture the prophet Isaiah is speaking to people who have been pillaged by wars, expelled from their homeland and felt abandoned. They were waiting in foreign lands for God to bring them home. Their hope is dissolving. They hear these words from the prophet, “I have called you by name. When you pass through waters, I will pass with you; when you walk through fire, you will not be burned.” These people looking for a compass, looking for hope, heard these words and knew that God had not abandoned them. “You are precious in my sight, honored and I love you.” What a message of joy! This gave them courage and strength to claim who they were and to claim their voice.

On the day of Jesus’ baptism, Jesus rose out of the water and a voice from the heavens said, “You are my beloved so with whom I am well pleased.” It was a message that gave Jesus courage to accept his call. He had heard God’s voice and because of this, he had the courage to claim his own voice.

In Psalm 29, the voice of God is mentioned 7 times in a very short time. It was believed that God spoke through thunder, earthquakes, and the rumble of nature. I'm not sure that God speaks to us through earthquakes, BUT how DOES God speak to us? And what does God call us to do?

When we hear God's voice, we hear and discover our own voice. We realize that God exists within us and around us. And because we have heard God, we claim who we are as people of Christ. It sounds so simple, doesn't it? But it isn't.

During this day and age it is hard to decipher and decode all the noise that surrounds us. Many who claim to hear the voice of God do horrible things in God's name – bombings and destruction. Some carry hateful signs, even at people's funerals to claim that God hates certain people. Yet, the message of the Gospel is love. The message of the Gospel is healing. The message of the Gospel is open arms of inclusion.

Our culture is so full of noise, it is hard to discern and decide which is God's joyful noise. If God's voice sounds just like yours and has the exact same opinions as yours – it is probably not God. To hear the voice of God, it is important to shake off all the sound of the world and truly listen to God's call.

Here are some things to ponder:

1. Is the nudging voice, you full of grace? God was pleased with Jesus even though he had done absolutely nothing in ministry yet.
2. Is there a deep sense of cherishing, delight, and love in God's voice? In Isaiah we hear how much she adores her children.
3. Does the voice of God come from a community gathered? We each experience God differently. And in order to get the whole picture, we got to listen to one another as well. Listening with expectation, holy listening.
4. The voice of God connects us with the earth, with one another and with God.
5. God's voice calls out to us in nature, in the midst of the darkness of life and in the midst of our routines. A friend had a religious experience in the shower one day...another while vacuuming the carpet. It is all about paying attention.

I understand that in the midst of all the challenges in the world, we would much rather go for comfort in life. But the voice of God is calling to us...has named us, claimed us...AND called us. We are a part of a great tradition. Abraham, as he was settling into retirement experienced God as he looked at the stars spread across the sky. He packed up everything and went on a mighty journey.

Moses was going about his regular routine and stepped aside to see a burning bush. And in the burning bush, God spoke and told him to lead a people. AND then there was Jesus at his baptism. We too are a part of God's history. We are precious, honored, and loved....AND CALLED.

Remember God – God has named you. Claim your voice.