

Mark 1:4-11

⁴John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

⁵And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. ⁶Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. ⁸I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

⁹In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. ¹¹And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

What does God's voice sound like? Think about it—if God were to speak to you right now, what would God's voice sound like? Would the voice be masculine, feminine...gentle, angry...loud, soft? Would God's voice even be a voice...or would it be something like the wind, or the sound of water?

I decided to get some help with this question, and so I e-mailed some friends and family to get their ideas about God's voice. Some of the people I e-mailed are seminary students, some are in high school or middle school, others are adults and older adults.

The responses I received ranged from humorous to very touching and beautiful. I wish I could share all of the responses...there were about 50 total, but I will just share a few with you. One person said, "everyone is different, so I think that he would sound different to everyone, just depending on their situations. It would be as if your heart had a voice, but it would say what needed to be said, not what you wanted to hear. He would sound like your closest most supportive and loving friend. You would just need to be still and listen to His words."

Some people thought of God's voice as movie characters. The most popular responses for that were Morgan Freeman, James Earl Jones and Charlton Heston. Some of the pastors that I e-mailed had the following responses: "God sounds like my congregation singing"; "God sounds like my dad singing a lullabye"; "God sounds like a loud gospel choir"; and "God sounds like a gentle whisper."

Here are a few responses that were just really beautiful, "God sounds like the quiet, peaceful breathing of a sleeping baby"; "God sounds like jazz music"; "God sounds compassionate and gentle, no harsh tones"; and "God's voice sounds like an angel...very soft."

One person said, "I've been getting myself into trouble lately and so I think if God were to speak to me now, his voice would be very intimidating...like my dad's, only worse."

And no matter what we imagine God's voice to sound like, God speaks. All four of the scripture readings today...Genesis, Psalm 29, Acts, and Mark give us examples of how God speaks, and they also give us their best guess at what God's voice would sound like. And more importantly, these readings give us insights into how God is present among us, which is in many ways.

Another response that was emailed to me was, "God's voice would be deep, majestic, and powerful...it would be holy." And to me, I can see that kind of voice when God is creating the world. In Genesis, when God created light, he said, "Let there be light", and light came to be. In my own imagination, I can hear God's voice as one being that powerful and deep voice.

But I can also imagine God's voice in Genesis to be a bit playful and delightful...such as when a child discovers a butterfly for the first time. In Genesis we hear about a God who delights in creating things, who thinks that all he created is "good."

Psalm 29 is a great help to the message today...it saved me from having to do a lot of research about God's voice because the subtitle to the Psalm is "The Voice of God in a Great Storm"! Someone else wrote in their guess about God's voice, "I hear God speaking through the wind and the waves and the trees blowing...I think God's voice is heard through nature."

Psalm 29 is certainly about nature, about God's voice in a storm. Listen again to some of the words that are used to describe God's voice here: "thunders", "breaks the cedars"; "flashes forth flames of fire." God's voice is very powerful in this Psalm, it is a voice that reminds us that God is strong, and as the Psalm says, "God sits enthroned as king forever."

And this portrayal of God's voice is one that we know we can trust, this is a voice that is stronger than anything we know, it is a voice that will speak louder and speak through our greatest disappointments and trials. God is a relational God, but God is also powerful...powerful enough to shoulder anything you tell him, whether it's the blessings in life of the struggles and temptations.

Another reply someone sent to me was, "God's voice sounds like my father's...my dad's voice was very soft and patient, and he rarely raised his voice." The reading from Acts is about being brought into God's family through baptism. In other scripture verses in the Bible, we hear about how we have each received a spirit of adoption through the Holy Spirit, which we believe happens at our baptism. The Holy Spirit is always at work in us, helping us to pray and to discern God's voice in our own lives...and to help foster the relationship we have with our creator.

I'm not going to stand up here and tell you how that happens, because I don't know that...it is a holy mystery. But we can trust that the Holy Spirit is working even when we don't know how, and that the Spirit of God empowers us to claim our relationship with God.

It is here, in these verses in Acts about the Holy Spirit, that I imagine God's voice being familiar, a voice that I have heard before. It would definitely be a voice that was warmly embracing...one that welcomes me into God's company...one that assures me that I am God's child, that we are God's children.

It is a family relationship, and the apostle Paul describes it as one being so intimate and connected that we can call God "Abba" which means "daddy"...this is the same kind of relationship that Jesus had with God, and as heirs for God we are invited into that same kind of relationship!

In our gospel reading, God definitely speaks. In fact, when Jesus was baptized, God opened the heavens and spoke, saying, "You are my son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." I wonder what those disciples thought when God spoke. What would we think, if during one of our baptisms here, if our ceiling was torn open and God's voice spoke to us?

But what an awesome moment. It was a moment where Jesus' ministry took off and this is the point where his journey to the cross would begin. It is also the point where we begin to hear God's voice through Jesus Christ. It is an authoritative voice, one that speaks truth and justice, but it is also a voice that we can trust, it is a voice that comes from God, it is a voice that gives testimony to God, it is a voice that IS God. Jesus' voice is one that speaks of forgiveness and hope and promise. It is a voice that speaks to love, God's love for us.

God speaks through many ways, and our four scripture readings pointed to these ways, which is how the Holy Trinity...Father, Son, Holy Spirit, work together so that we can hear God's voice in our own lives.

And finally, if I had to answer the question of what God's voice would sound like, I would answer, "it would sound like you, and like you, and like you...God's voice would sound like each one of us." For we, too, are God's voice. We share God's love with our words, we speak to God's grace with our daily interactions.

And if God speaks to us through so many ways...through scripture, the Holy Spirit, Jesus...how will your voice be a witness to God's love and grace? Trust that God will use your voice, that God is already using your voice in powerful ways.

And maybe you don't even realize how your voice speaks to God. There was a young girl, maybe five or six years old. She was asked what God's voice sounded like, and after thinking for a moment, she said, "My mom. God is my mom. Not when she yells, but when she sings."

And the mother, who was beside the girl, looked over in shock and said, "I can't sing on key if my life depended on it!" And so our voices may not be perfect, we may not say the perfect things, but God still works in that, and our voices are still needed.

May we live in the promise that God's voice, God's presence is always with us as we use our own voices to share God with the world. Amen.