

“What Is God Saying to You?”

I've been spending a lot of time praying and reflecting on prayer lately.
Our Wednesday noontime prayer has become an important part of my week,
I've popped into a Bible study at Cross of Christ in Waterbury a few times to join their study on prayer,
I've been reading a book on prayer,
and I've been working with the pastoral leaders in our conference
as we plan a joint midweek Lenten series called “Lenten Adventures in Prayer”.

And as I read over the lessons for Sunday it dawned on me
that almost all my time in these various prayer ventures has focused on OUR part in prayer –
when to pray, where to pray, how to pray, and for what we should pray –
but very little of my time has been focused on God's part in prayer – what God is saying to us.

So let me ask you: how do you hear God?

That's a serious question and I would absolutely love to stop talking right now and have you all share.
But I realize we're on Facebook Live and you may not feel comfortable witnessing to the entire world,
but I do invite you to maybe share at coffee hour, or give me a call later this week and we'll talk.

One of the ways I hear God is as a voice in my head.

Sometimes that voice is soft and whispers to me things like:

“You should call so-and-so....” or

“You should really stop procrastinating and get to work on your sermon....” or

“You really shouldn't let that racist remark stand unchallenged....”

I know it's God's voice because it's saying the things that I know God wants.

Some people may call it their conscience.

Others may view it as the voice of an angel sitting on their one shoulder, balancing the devil on the other.

But for me it's God.

And I'm pretty sure you all know what it's like to hear God whisper such things in your ear.

God also speaks to me in a very loud and clear voice.

This doesn't happen often, but it certainly makes those times all the more memorable.

One time when I was young I didn't listen. I thought I knew better than God. But I didn't.

And that decision ended up leading me down a path to a particular life goal
that has been much harder and longer than I ever imagined.

In fact, I think that's what contributed to my being like Nathaniel,
not really expecting that my future would ever be much different from my past or present.

I had disobeyed and chosen my own path and the longer I was on it,
the more I knew it wasn't leading where I wanted to go,
but it wasn't like I could go back and start over!

I was like Jonah, who disobeyed, hopped aboard a ship bound in the opposite direction,
and found himself in the middle of a storm, being thrown overboard and left to drown in the sea.
But God showed up with a big fish to swallow him and transport him to the place he could fulfill his destiny.

So God speaks in a small whispering voice, and in a loud clear voice.

And **God speaks through events and circumstances** as well.

Like with the voice, these events and circumstances can be large or small.

They can be huge life-changing events –

like a whale for Jonah, a pit for Joseph, a burning bush for Moses,
angels for Mary and Joseph, a star for the magi, a transfiguring vision for Peter, James and John,
blinding light for Paul, a mighty wind, tongues of fire and speaking in tongues for the apostles,
getting a full scholarship to your first choice school, being healed from cancer,
or finally finding the love of your life after over 50 years.

Or they can be small daily life events – like asking God to find \$1 in lost change and finding it,
or asking God to please help you find your phone
and looking down to see it in a place you know you looked at least 3 times before,
or praying for someone you haven't spoken to in weeks and having that person call right after your prayer.

God also speaks through the words of others.

I said that I was like Jonah - that I had gone off in the opposite direction from what God had wanted.
And then I was like Nathaniel, assuming my future would simply be an extension of my past and present
and not expecting anything much from God to change it.
But then just as Jesus spoke to Nathaniel and told him that he knew everything about him and offered him a new life,
God spoke to me again in that clear, loud voice and said,
“I know where you are to go — where you will find what you desire –
and don't worry, even though this isn't the easiest path, I will get you there.”
It was that loud clear voice, but as progress appears slow or non-existent,
there have been times I've doubted whether it was really God's voice.
And then God used another way of speaking – through other people.
So as I was looking ahead over the next 3 years
and doubting whether anything really significant could happen in my ministry in just 3 years' time,
I got a phone call from a friend and in the course of the conversation he said,
“that was the biggest miracle that's ever happened to me. It took **3 years**, but it happened!”
And I knew that was confirmation of what God had promised – that it was indeed God's voice I had heard –
confirmation from God coming through the voice of another person.

God speaks in whispers and in a loud clear voice.
God speaks through miraculous events – as small as a lost coin or as big as a whale.
God speaks through the words and actions of other people.
God speaks through the so-called “coincidences” of our lives.
I say so-called because I've learned that what may appear as coincidences to the eyes of those without faith,
are in fact one of the ways that God delights in surprising us with joy.
And God speaks through a physical sensation that some would describe as “chills”,
or as someone once called it, “the supercharge of the Holy Spirit”,
with the Holy Spirit lighting up every cell in the human body and making them shimmer with life energy.

The Bible says that God has spoken in many and various ways.
The Bible itself is the story of God speaking – not just to those in the stories but to us as well.

In my own life God speaks to me in whispers and in a clear loud voice.
God speaks to me in miracles great and miracles small.
God speaks to me through people in their words and actions.
God speaks to me through quirky coincidences on an almost daily basis, and sometimes through physical sensations.

The question is: How is God speaking to you? What is God saying to you? Where is God calling you?

I hope you will not only reflect on those questions; I hope you will share the answers.
Because the more you share about what God is saying and doing in your life,
the more things God will say to you and do in and through you.

It took Samuel awhile to recognize God's voice.
It took Nathaniel a bit to realize how amazing it would be to follow Jesus.
It took Jonah awhile to understand God had not given up on him.
But they, like Andrew, Peter, James and John, eventually followed where God led.
And their stories have impacted the world for thousands of years, continuing to impact us today.

My prayer for you this day is this:
May you hear God's voice.
May you follow where God leads.
And in the journey may you find all you need. **Amen**