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 December 19, 2010
 3rd Sunday of Advent

Listening to that One Voice
Matthew 1:18-25

Nurse Mary Williamson, Kirbyville, TX neglected to tell her new patient, a little boy, how his *hospital bed intercom* worked. Soon his light flashed. She called his name and asked what he wanted.

There was complete silence. She repeated herself.

After a long pause he said, "Jesus, I hear you but I don't see you.

Where are you?"

Today's Christian Woman, "Heart to Heart." Dec 2010

Has God ever talked *directly to you* clearly like that?

Do you believe that God talks to us that directly anymore?

I mean we wish (or I do) that it was as clear as a hospital bed intercom.

But all too often it seems that God's voice is difficult to discern.

But--- is it that *our lives* just make it hard to hear amidst all the chaos?

I don't know exactly what it was like in the time of Joseph and Mary.

They were young followers of God—faithful people.

They knew the stories, as we do, of other faithful people who heard from God....In dreams and visions, in person, and in still small voices.

They knew that *God spoke* to people.

But surely they didn't expect anything extraordinary to happen to them.

And especially something so embarrassing, and scandalous.

We talked last week about all the scandal for Mary.

But the same is true for Joseph! Joseph was happily engaged one moment,

The next he was sitting in front of Mary listening to a preposterous story about her being pregnant..... by the Holy Spirit!

So being the *good man* he was, he decided to divorce her quietly, so she could avoid the public stoning that was expected for an adulterer.

His life as he knew it was over. All his dreams, all their plans, all his hopes for their future together—gone in an instant.

And then, in the middle of his sorrow—came *the dream*.

God was speaking to him!

That he would indeed marry his beloved, they would have this Son,

And name him Jesus, Emmanuel (God with us).

That this baby boy would grow to be a Savior,

But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

When he woke up he knew the dream was from God,

He felt *God's reassurance*

I know this is not what you expected, but it's going to be just fine.

He didn't understand all of it, but he knew that he could get married and have this son, and embrace him as his own.

So he got up, and obeyed.

It *was a plan*, a way through the nightmare, a pathway to hope---

And not just for him, little did he know this baby

Was the hope for all the world.

Have you ever had a dream that gave you *direction*?

I've received sermons in dreams.....and ideas from God.

I believe *God still speaks* to us in dreams.....

And in our prayers....in quiet moments....

Even through one another.

And so often God's voice comes to us in times that don't make sense,

In the *tough times*, difficult moments, the times when we are being asked to do something we don't know if we can do.

It's a little bit like driving in a totally foreign area

with one of those *GPS devices*.

I don't have one, but I've been in the car with one....

And this woman's voice is telling you exactly which direction to turn.

You know the place where you want to end up.....
 She tells you turn left, but sometimes it doesn't make any sense to you,
 so you go right. Know what happens? She says something like this
recalculating route. When safe to do so, make a u turn.

You can get *frustrated* and unplug her. But when you plug her back in
 she'll say....*recalculating route. When safe to do so, make a u turn.*

God's voice is a little like that.
 Coming to us like a GPS for our lives—
 giving us directions when we don't know where to go.

We can choose not to listen, we can unplug from God's Spirit.
 We can ignore and go the other way.
 But in the end God will still be there giving us the same directions.

It might come to us while we are *driving*, or lying in *bed* at night.
 It might come to us while we are *praying*, or drinking *coffee* in the morning.
 It might come to us in the voice of a dear and trusted Christian *friend*.

And if we listen, we find our way through the trials of life.
 If we don't---not only do we not find our way,
 But our *ears become dull* to the voice of God the next time.
 We listen so we can keep on hearing that Voice.....

A few years ago it was popular for the kids to use a special ringtone on their
 cell phones to keep teachers from discovering that they are using their
 phones in school. The pitch of this ringtone, called the "*mosquito tone*,"
 is too high for people over 25 to hear. So the kids can still send and receive
 text messages during class without the teacher knowing.

The mosquito tone was first developed in *Great Britain* to irritate teenagers
 who were loitering around convenience stores and keeping customers away
 by their loud and obnoxious behavior...

Some kid simply figured out how to use that sound as his cell phone's
 ringtone and—voilà—kids are downloading it by the millions.

How does the *mosquito tone* go undetected by adults older than 25?

Inside our ears we have tiny microscopic hairs that move with the impulses of incoming sound waves, and those hair movements send electrical signals to our brain. As we age, those hairs get worn down, actually damaged, so our hearing becomes less sensitive. We first lose the ability to detect the sounds of high frequencies. People over 25 can't hear sounds above 16 kilohertz.

(The highest note on a piano is 4 Khz; the mosquito tone is 17 Khz.)

This situation serves as an analogy to help us understand the common difficulty of detecting communication from God. According to Scripture, God can be perceived in the wonders of creation, and all people—can detect God. But if they don't respond, they gradually lose the ability to sense God altogether...

They lose "*spiritual ear hair*" so to speak. The same principle holds true even for Christians, who can lose their sensitivity to God if we don't respond appropriately to his specific promptings.

Doug Newton, "Spiritual Ear Hair," Light & Life magazine (January/February 2008), p. 32

So How *do YOU* hear the voice of God?

When and Where can YOU make time to hear it?

I know *for me* it most often happens after I pray, when I'm alone and just thinking and listening....I might even be driving or reading.

Sometimes I wonder if it's *just me* dreaming up this stuff,
But then I realize that I'm not that smart, and it's gotta be God talking!

I've heard people describe God's voice as their *conscience*,
That inner guiding voice...

And other people talk about it as a *light* that comes into their lives.

I believe that if your Christmas *isn't perfect* this year...if times are tough,
If like Joseph you are facing some circumstances that put you in a bind,
Well, we have evidence that *God likes to talk* to people in times like these.

The question is, will you be *ready to listen*?

Will you make time for God to talk to you, especially this Christmas?

And when God does have something to say—will you follow?

Monk and writer **Thomas Merton** wrote fifteen famous lines that have become known as "the Merton Prayer"—words that humbly sum up the desire to follow God's voice.

*My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going.
I do not see the road ahead of me.
I cannot know for certain where it will end.
Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so.
But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you.
And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing.
I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire.
And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road,
though I may know nothing about it.
Therefore I will trust you always though I may seem to be lost
and in the shadow of death.
I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me
to face my perils alone.*

Merton points out the **Good News** about following God's voice.
Sometimes we don't know what we're doing,
And God just carries us along the road....
We don't know enough to follow, so we are carried in His arms.

But when we are **asked to listen**, and to follow,
May our ears not be dulled by the world.
May we open our ears, our hearts, and our lives,
For that Voice that brings the good news into our world, and the world.
Especially this Christmas.
Amen.