



“Where is God’s Voice?”

Preaching Text: 1 Kings 19:1-15a
23 June 2013: 5th Sunday after Pentecost
FUMC, Arlington, Texas

“Don’t fight a battle if you don’t gain anything by winning”
(Field Marshal Erwin Rommel)

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One of the things the church is very good at doing is looking backward. My favorite day—most days—is the olden days. And yet as people of hope, love, and charity it is vital that we who trust in God through Christ and keep ourselves ready with one eye to the future. That being said, our youngsters and the faith we hope we help them develop will well serve our world for many years.

An alert reader sent me an e-mail article titled: “Fifteen Things that Teenagers Ask about When Given the Chance to do so Anonymously.” One of the list’s first questions, one that everyone in this sanctuary could or should ask from time to time, is:

How do I know what God’s will is? How do I know if I’m called to ministry?

As this question is good for all people, I hasten to add that this question leads us directly to today’s prophet Elijah. He was trying to discern exactly what he had done to deserve a “special relationship” to Queen Jezebel who for all practical purposes ran Israel although her husband was—technically—the king. Hear our lesson as we try to discern how we hear God’s voice that determines how we do God’s will and respond in ministry.

Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. 2 Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, “So may the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life like the life of one of them by this time tomorrow.” 3 Then he was afraid; he got up and fled for his life, and came to Beer-sheba, which belongs to Judah; he left his servant there. 4 But he himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a solitary broom tree. He asked that he might die: “It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life, for I am no better than my ancestors.”

5 Then he lay down under the broom tree and fell asleep. Suddenly an angel touched him and said to him, “Get up and eat.” 6 He looked, and there at his head was a cake baked on hot stones, and a jar of water. He ate and drank, and lay down again. 7 The angel of the



LORD came a second time, touched him, and said, “Get up and eat, otherwise the journey will be too much for you.” 8 He got up, and ate and drank; then he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God.

9 At that place he came to a cave, and spent the night there. Then the word of the LORD came to him, saying, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” 10 He answered, “I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away.” 11 He said, “Go out and stand on the mountain before the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by.” Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake; 12 and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence.

13 When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then there came a voice to him that said, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” 14 He answered, “I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away.” 15 Then the LORD said to him, “Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus . . .” (1 Kings 19:1-15).

Elijah’s work was just about finished—and so was he. In our lesson from 2 Kings next week Elijah passes the prophet’s mantle to Elisha and then is “transformed” into the heavens. To review today’s text and context, Elijah has just defeated 450 prophets of the false god Baal, making it undeniably obvious that Yahweh was God and Baal was not! The complication concerning his spectacular victory over the prophets of an idol was that Jezebel threatened to have Elijah’s life—and she was not just whistling Dixie, either.

So Elijah escaped. After leaving his servant behind in Judah, Elijah traveled a day’s journey farther. Under a broom tree he felt utterly abandoned by God. Yet in a dream God provided bread and water so Elijah would have the energy to travel. Elijah journeyed to a cave and God commanded he stand on a mountain to see the Lord pass by. You know this part: a great wind, an earthquake, and fire each appeared, but God was in none of these. Then followed a great silence, and in that silence Elijah felt connected to God.



How do I know what God's will is? How do I know if we are called to ministry?

Good questions.

A man woke up in the night with a feeling that someone was in his bedroom. He was not sure whether something had actually touched him on the face or whether he had dreamed it. He was terrified as he felt alone. He opened his eyes slowly, trying not to make any sound—or move. Then he saw it and felt it as something brushed past him. Whatever it was, it was beside his bed. His heart was pounding and he waited with fear, knowing that the blow of a hammer, or an ax, or a knife would strike him any minute. His fear froze him. As the long hours of the night slowly passed, the threatening presence in the room continued to move from place to place.

Finally dawn came and revealed the nature of the intruder: It was a balloon—a Mickey Mouse balloon that his son had brought home from the fair the day before. The boy had released it, and it was on the ceiling when the parents went to bed. Gradually during the night the helium had escaped, and as it lost helium, it descended from the ceiling. Finally, it floated over the bed and moved with the movements of the air in the room. What a night (from unpublished newsletter article: "Help Me Make it Through the Night" 28 January 2010, Tom Butts, pastor emeritus, FUMC, Monroeville, AL)!

Often people are full of doubts. In our desire to control our future we retire into postures of fear. We each fear a variety of different things, but when fear of the future grips us; fear robs us of present joy and sometimes our good sense. Some people fear failure while others fear success. Some people spend edgy nights anxious about what other people think of them. We fear for our children, our health, our nation, and world. At times we fear things that we ought to fear, but far too often we fear things we need not fear. Fear always clouds our discernment and ability to discriminate between things true and false.

John Wesley had an approach to help his Methodist people with discernment—a skill that enables us to see issues clearly. Sometimes we only need a simple, practical



way to explore our choices. Wesley suggested in the sum of his writings that we may include four aspects into deliberation when discerning the truth of the Christian life: scripture, tradition, reason, and experience. Thus according to work derived from Wesley, we can test our discernment process by using our head (reason) and heart (experience) as well as listening to scripture and tradition.

All of us need one degree or another of discernment because we are all ministers by virtue of our baptism. An ill-fated expression is this: “Whats-his-name is going into the ministry.” Perhaps well-intentioned, the phrase reveals a distortion with respect to Christian ministry: we as a church call only the ordained ministers. *Au contraire*: ministers are all the baptized—everyone in this room who is baptized is a minister. And this being so, we all need to sharpen our gift of discernment by using Wesley’s four-fold principles for faith discernment: scripture, tradition, reason, and experience.

So to answer the question about where is God’s voice, perhaps we can answer by saying that we can find God’s voice as we listen in the silent places of our scripture, tradition, reason and experience. They will speak to us. Amen.