

## Listening for the Voice of God in Lent

Epiphany proceeds the Season of Lent and one of the many interesting things about Epiphany is that it both begins and ends with stories from the gospels in which we hear the voice of God. On the First Sunday in Epiphany we hear the story of the baptism of Jesus. The climax of this story is when the voice of God proclaims, "Jesus, you are my beloved and in you I am well pleased." And, then on the last Sunday in Epiphany, immediately before Ash Wednesday and the beginning of Lent, we have the Transfiguration story where the voice of God says, "This is my beloved Son. Listen to him!"



The Hebrew name for this Divine Voice is "*bat Cole*" which translated into English becomes "the daughter of a sound". In 1 Kings in the Old Testament we hear the story of Elijah in a cave when the presence of God passes past him. There we are told that Elijah hears a "still, small voice" or more literally "the sound of thinnest silence". That's *bat Cole*...the daughter of a sound, the sound of thinnest silence, a still, small voice...all different ways of attempting to express something that lies beyond the boundaries of speech.

One of my fellow students once shared with the class that his wife had plainly heard the voice of God. She said that, "She didn't hear it with her ear, but she heard the Voice." Perhaps you've had a similar experience but if not, no worries, because God also speaks to us in less dramatic ways.

We sometimes hear the voice of God in our dreams, or in gentle nudges from friends, or from inexplicable leadings and proddings from God's Spirit. Sometimes God speaks to us through scripture or through the liturgical seasons of the church. And, as Transfiguration Sunday approaches let us prepare to hear God's voice implore once more, "This is my beloved Son. Listen to him!"

In Mark's gospel, immediately after we hear the Voice say these words comes Ash Wednesday and the beginning of Lent which recounts Jesus' final journey from Galilee to Jerusalem. As I have said before the Season of Lent is all about following Jesus on that journey and our listening to Jesus along the way.

Jesus said, "If any person would come after me, let that person take up their cross and follow me." And, the Apostle Paul teaches the same thing when he says, "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me." If we are to take the way of the cross seriously this Lenten Season it means that we are willing to die with Christ but it also means that we are willing to be resurrected with Christ...to be reborn in Christ.

As we begin the Season of Lent on Ash Wednesday the ashes will remind us of sin and death when we hear, "You are dust and to dust you shall return". But, as we journey with Jesus to Jerusalem and listen to him along the way, we will also be assured that Lent is most certainly about rebirth....dying to an old way of being and being born into a new way of being. Yes, dying to an old identity and being born into a new identity in God, in the Spirit, in Christ...this is what we aspire to achieve every Lent.

Dust may be our ending, but it was also our beginning. Dust and ash are reminders of our mortality and calls us to repentance but dust is also the stuff of creation. Church historian Diana Butler Bass says of Ash Wednesday, "Deserts do bloom. Charred landscapes birth new forests. From dust and ash come flowers and trees and fruitful fields. Dust is not nothing; ash is not nothing. Dust and ash are necessary for new life."

Perhaps Ash Wednesday and the entire season of Lent is not so much about our mortality and our need for repentance as it is about renewal, new life, and rebirth. So, let us pray for that which will be reborn in our spiritual hearts and renewed in our lives during these forty days, as we listen for the Voice that will bring us closer to God, to God's amazing creation, and to one another.

Peace,  
Pastor Paul

\*\*\*Note - we will bring the Season of Epiphany to a close as we celebrate the Sacrament of Holy Communion on Transfiguration Sunday here at the Chapel on February 11 at 9:00. And, we will enter into the Season of Lent as we gather on Ash Wednesday at 5:00 for the Imposition of Ashes. Please place both of these most important worship services on your calendar. And, for those of you planning a romantic night out for Valentine's Day, I bet dinner reservations will be easier to get on Tuesday or Thursday and that will free you up to worship with your Chapel Family and Friends on Ash Wednesday.

