

**The 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent: Holy Trinity Church: March 18, 2018**

**John 12: 20-33: Blah, Blah, Blah...Love, Love, Love...**

**Preached**

**By**

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**In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.**

**A man is watching television. His wife is trying to engage him in conversation:**

**“Dear, the plumber didn’t come to fix the leak behind the water heater today.”**

**Husband: “Uh-huh.”**

**Wife: “The pipe burst today and flooded the basement.”**

**Husband: “Be quiet. It’s third down and goal to go.”**

**Wife: “Some of the wiring got wet and almost electrocuted Fluffy.”**

**Husband: “Darn it! Touchdown!”**

**Wife: “The vet says he’ll be better in a week.”**

**Husband: “Can you get me a Coke?”**

**Wife: “The plumber told me that he was happy that our pipe broke because**

**now he can afford to go on vacation.”**

**Husband: “Aren’t you listening? I said I could use a Coke!”**

**Wife: “And Stanley, I’m leaving you. The plumber and I are flying to Acapulco in the morning.”**

**Husband: “Can’t you please stop all that yakking and get me a Coke? The trouble around here is that nobody ever listens to me.” Poor guy, nobody was listening.**

**Today’s Gospel from John opens with Jesus in Bethany, where Mary and Martha and Lazarus lived. Bethany was a small village about one and a half miles from Jerusalem. This was some time after Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead. In gratitude, Mary and Martha were throwing a dinner party in Jesus’ honor. Lazarus, of course, was there, alive and in the flesh, as we say. A large crowd of Jews found out that Jesus was there and came, not only because they wanted to see him, but also to see Lazarus. Lazarus had become quite a celebrity. Can you imagine the tabloid headlines?: “Bethany Resident First Man to Be Raised from the Dead.” From the beginning of his ministry, Jesus had a rock star kind of following. The raising of Lazarus did nothing to discourage that. As one of the Pharisees said to a colleague, “Look how the whole world has gone after him!”**

Among those who came to see Jesus were some Greeks. They approached Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee. Philip's surname was Greek and his home village was known as a place where there were numerous Greek descendants. Maybe the visiting Greeks thought Philip would be more open to their inquiries than the other disciples. "Sir," they said to him, "we would like to see Jesus." Philip went to tell Andrew; and together they told Jesus. Jesus was not impressed. He replied as he often did with a somewhat cryptic message about his coming death. He concludes his response to them by saying, *"Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!"* Then a voice came from heaven, *"I have glorified it, and will glorify it again."*

Seemingly this was an audible voice, a voice which could be heard by anyone listening. But notice this: John tells us that the crowd assembled there heard the voice coming down out of heaven and dismissed it as thunder; others said an angel had spoken to Jesus. In response to their reaction, Jesus said, "This voice was for your benefit, not mine . . ."

It was Trinity Sunday and I was preaching about the relationship of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. A few weeks later, the parents

of a second grader were talking about my sermon. At lunch, in the midst of their conversation, their 8 year old daughter sitting at the table chimed in. “Oh, Father John’s sermons, they’re always the same,” she said, “You know . . . blah, blah, blah, . . . love, love, love. . . blah, blah, blah . . . love, love, love.” I think the parents thought I would be offended by their child’s response, but I was amused and thought, “Hey, this little girl really gets it, the message, the repetition, the core, the redundancy of it all. And so it is with the message of the gospel and so it has been for over 2,000 years and yet always fresh, always challenging, always interpreted in the heart of every person who hears and listens to it. Over and over again . . . blah, blah, blah, love, love, love. . . blah, blah, love, love, love.” Out of the mouths of babes, who would have think it? “God the Creator, I love you and give you life. God the Redeemer, I love you and embrace you in that love forever. God the Holy Spirit, I love you and warm your heart and your soul with my love. Yes indeed: Blah, blah, blah, love, love love, blah, blah, blah!”

My sisters and brothers, I wish that is what the people heard that day when the voice spoke from heaven, blah, blah blah, love, love, love, blah, blah. But John describes it like this: “The crowd that was there and heard the voice said it had thundered.”

**Here's the truth of the matter: Many people are so disconnected from God, that if God were to speak to them, they would not hear God's voice. All they would hear would be thunder. Jesus said to those who heard only thunder, "This voice was for your benefit, not mine," but they did not hear. There is a rather obscure definition of sin in the Bible. It comes from a Hebrew word that means "a failure to listen." When we fail to listen, we are cut off from whoever is speaking to us.**

**In George Bernard Shaw's play *St. Joan*, which is about Joan of Arc, Joan tells of hearing God's messages. She is talking to King Charles. Charles doesn't appreciate this crazy lady in armor who insists on leading his armies. He's threatened by her. He says, "Oh, your voices, your voices, always your voices. Why don't the voices come to me? I am king, not you."**

**Joan replies, "They do come to you, but you do not hear them. You have not sat in the field in the evening listening for them. When the Angelus rings . . . you cross yourself and have done with it. But, if you prayed from your heart and listened to the trilling of the bells in the air after they stop ringing, you would hear the voices as well as I do." Joan heard the voice of God; the king, if he heard anything at all, heard only thunder. Why? because she was listening for that voice. Some people are so disconnected from God that they**

**never hear God's voice. Other people are so preoccupied with their own pursuits that they're unaware when God speaks.**

**So my sisters and brothers here is the challenge of this week's gospel message, how well do you listen to those around you? How well do you listen to God?**

**There is a scene from the movie *Ray* which was based on the life of musician Ray Charles. Ray Charles went blind at age seven. He lived his childhood in poverty, in a one room shack at the edge of a sharecropper's field. In this scene from the movie, we see Ray as a child run into his house and trip over a chair. He starts to wail for his mother. She stands at the stove, right in front of him, and instinctively reaches out to lift him. Then she stops. She backs up. She stands still. She watches. Young Ray stops crying. He listens. He hears, behind him, the water on the wood stove whistling to a boil. He hears, outside, the wind pass like a hand through the cornstalks. He hears the thud of horse hooves on the road, the creak and clatter of the wagon they pull. Then he hears, in front of him, the thin faint scratch of a grasshopper walking the worn floorboards of his mama's cottage. He inches over and, attentive now to every sigh and twitch, gathers the tiny insect in his hand. He holds it in his open palm. 'I hear you, too, Mama,' he says. She weeps with pride and sorrow and wonder.' Later in life, Ray Charles explains to someone, "I hear like you**

**see.” Ray Charles trained himself to listen. That would be wise for those of us who have our sight. Listen to your spouses. Listen to your children. Listen to your loved ones. Listen to your friends. Listen to God.**

**It is important to know that God does speak to those who listen, not audibly. The voice of God will be an inward voice, a silent voice, a voice within your heart and mind. God may speak to you through your spouse, your child. God may speak to you through a strong emotion. I truly believe, the greatest untapped source of power in this world is the unheeded voice of God in human affairs. Jesus said, “This voice was for your benefit, not mine . . .”**

**My dear sisters and brothers in Christ, we need to find God, but God cannot be found in noise and restlessness. God is the friend of silence. Just look and see how nature’s trees, flowers and grass thrives in silence; see the stars, see the moon and sun, see how they all move in silence. The more we receive in silent prayer, the more we can give to others in our active life. We need silence to be able to touch soul of another person. The essential thing is not what we say, but what God says to us and through us.” God spoke but all most people heard was thunder. So, how about you? Like the little 8 year old girl, do you hear God’s voice today in the blah, blah, blah....love, love, love. AMEN.**