God Is Still Speaking

I suspect a lot of you remember the cell phone company ad from several years ago, where the guy goes farther and farther from the person he is speaking to. At each point, ever more remote, he asks, “Can you hear me now?” Sometimes it seems like that’s the way it is with God. Sometimes It’s hard to hear God now.

Our God is a God who speaks. We know that about God. It was God’s voice, God’s spoken word, according to Genesis 1, that called light and darkness, sun and stars, and every living thing into being. The Bible, which we call the written word of God, tells us about God speaking to people like Abraham and Moses and the prophets. The first name the gospel writer John uses for Jesus is “the Word made flesh”. Yes, in the Bible God talks a lot, in all different kinds of ways.

But the last parts of our Bible were written 1900 years ago. The order of the books of the Bible and what was included and what was left out was decided 1700 years ago. That was a long time ago. As much as those ancient words have wisdom, sometimes they seem lost in the mists of time, as if God is speaking from a vast distance, long ago and far away. We look at the world around us, where the rich and powerful just get more rich and powerful and the voiceless are silenced once again, and we wonder, “Where is God? Why can’t we hear him? Is there any chance that God is speaking still?”

The book of Hebrews in the Bible, from which I read this morning, is really a sermon – a pretty long sermon – that was preached to a congregation long ago, but a congregation that wasn’t so different from some of us. There were folks who were discouraged. Some were even suffering for their faith. Tom Long says, “Tired of walking the walk, some of them were considering taking a walk, leaving the community, giving up on their faith.” They wondered if God had stopped speaking, or stopped caring. Sound familiar?

The preacher doesn’t start with any folksy anecdote or personal story or cool cultural reference. He starts right in: “Long ago, God spoke to our ancestors in various ways through the prophets. But in these last days, he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed his heir in all things…” In beautiful rolling phrases, he goes on to describe the whole arc of salvation, the wonder and glory of what God has done through Jesus and how God has put everything under his control. Then slips in a little phrase:

“We do not yet see everything in subjection to them…” Now there’s the understatement of the year. There is no question that this world is a work in progress. So many things that seem out of control, so many places, including within ourselves, where things are not as they should be.

Then he goes on to say, “But we do see Jesus.” Jesus, God’s final and all-sufficient word, who speaks to us about what God is really doing and saying in the world even now. In Jesus, we see a God who is willing to give up the glory, give up the authority, to even offer himself up as a sacrifice that was so great it makes up for all other sacrifices past or future, doing what ever it takes to save others – to save even us, and maybe even to save our enemies. This is a God who lives in glory but understands suffering because he has suffered. This is a Word that teaches us how to live by his own example.

So where in this work-in-progress world do we see Jesus? Where do we hear God’s word to us now? God is speaking to us now wherever a person suffers and needs to be lifted up, wherever a woman finds her voice and speaks the truth, wherever one person hears a cry of pain and stops to listen, wherever someone takes the time and finds the words to teach the way of love. God is speaking wherever immigrants cry out for their children, and where people speak on a child’s behalf. God is speaking in a hospital room where words of comfort are offered to the dying, and on the streets where people shout for justice. And on this World Communion Sunday, we know that God is speaking wherever in the world God’s people gather for worship and come to the table of grace.

So as we come to this table this morning, let us listen for the word that God is speaking to us here and now. Let us listen for the voice of the heavenly choir that sings of God’s glory, but let us listen even more to the voices around us through whom Jesus speaks to us here and now, the voices not of the proud and the powerful, but of those who from ordinary places seek to serve and to heal in Jesus’ name. Look to Jesus and listen – God is speaking still. Can you hear God now?