

Today is a wonderful opportunity to join the Christ & Holy Trinity Church in worship. I recall the last time I was here was during the summer of 2002 after I had just graduated from Yale Divinity School. I served in the parish for about ten weeks as 'Priest in Residence'. It feels great to visit again, thank you.

Have you ever been in a place you are not sure of? Have you pursued something in life and wondered whether God wills it for you? Or have you ever felt misplaced in your thoughts and uncertain of what next step to take? The best that could happen in such a situation would be to hear a heartening God's word of validation. But hearing from or listening to God seems a rare phenomenon in our normal spiritual experience. Lifestyle in the modern world has proved a great threat to the practice of listening to God's affirming voice. Music, traffic, and busy schedules amongst life's numerous daily events often deny us the privilege of drawing near to a listening point with God. As Christians we need to believe that God still speaks AS BEFORE to this present generation. Yet, how many Christians truly hear God speaking to them?

The lectionary readings for today have a common theme of **listening or hearing God's voice of affirmation**. In the Exodus account we notice the man Moses being called by God to go up to the Mountain top to receive the stone tablets that bore the Law as written by God's own finger, which Moses had already spoken to Israel. Moses stood as mediator between Israel and God. He served uniquely as God's spokesman, revealing the plan of God. Moses remained the voice of God throughout Israel's wilderness experience. And God promised that he would raise up another prophet like Moses that Israel would have to listen to (Deut. 18: 15, 19).

In the Gospel narrative we meet Jesus in a very rare scene. He takes his inner three disciples - Peter, John and James up the Mountain with Him and there in their presence He is transfigured. The Gospel account vividly describes this extraordinary happening: Jesus' face shone like the sun and His clothes became as white as the light. In the vision with Jesus are Moses and Elijah – two figures of great importance in the history of Israel. Moses, the Law-giver and Elijah, the fiery prophet of Israel, were both prototypes of Jesus whom Jesus surpasses.

Paul in the Romans epistle asserts that Jesus is the end of the Law, since all the Law pointed to Him. Jesus did not come to abolish the Law but to fulfill it. Concerning the Prophets, Jesus is the culmination of all prophecy. What was written came about for Jesus' sake.

The transfiguration must have been a very awesome experience for the three disciples who witnessed it. It is not a wonder that Peter is quick to request Jesus to prolong that glorious encounter with the Divine. Just then, they were enveloped in a cloud and a voice rings out saying: "This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased, listen to Him". This was not the only time a voice from heaven spoke regarding Jesus. During His baptism in the River Jordan, the heavens opened and a voice was heard, "This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased". Jesus as the fulfillment of every prophecy was here fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy, 'Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one with whom I am pleased' (Isa. 42:1). Also, in Isaiah 49:3, "You are my servant, through whom I will show my glory."

In the transfiguration, God validates Jesus as His beloved son, and one who comes on a specific mission- note the words, "listen to Him". Jesus is an emissary that believers are called to pay attention. This week on Ash Wednesday, we will commence the long 40 day journey of Lent that concludes with the events of the cross and resurrection. We will remember Christ's mission on earth – to redeem humankind. What a great time to let go other voices and listen to God during the entire period of Lent?

The transfiguration granted the three disciples to hear God confirming the identity of Jesus. Could there have been doubt regarding Jesus' identity/role? Perhaps the early Church struggled with the identity of Jesus as the son of God and the long awaited Messiah. A voice to validate Jesus' identity was therefore inevitable. The voice from heaven caused the disciples fear and could only but prostrate themselves before their Lord. As much as the

transfiguration was an extraordinary revelation, the disciples did not comprehend it. It was only after resurrection that the whole picture became clear.

Peter, later reassured his readers that what was written in Scriptures was just not mere fabricated fables, but rather valid testimonies of the eyewitnesses of the transfiguration, which he was one. They saw, heard and lived through the transfiguration event that glorified Christ. John, too, when writing his first letter begins boldly by saying: "That which we heard, saw, touched with our own hands is what we proclaim to you" (I Jn. 1:1). Indeed God has continually spoken to people, communicating His eternal purposes and making known the plan of salvation through the written word of God. It is this word of God when upheld that shines clearly in a dark place waiting on until day dawns and morning star rises in our hearts. God will speak to us and watch that word to fulfill it (Jer. 1:12). We must learn to listen to God and believe what the Word says.

The challenge we often have is whether we are at a listening point in our lives? I have found that in my Christian experience I listen to God's voice by applying three questions:

- Is there a definite message in the Word of God regarding the issue? This could be exemplified in the life of Jesus through the Gospel story; extended in the life of the early Church as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles; or expounded in the teachings found in the epistles?
- Secondly, by searching in my inner chamber the blessed quietness or peaceable experience that assures me of God's acceptance of what I am doing.
- Finally, hearing a validation from another person, often it would be a person whose life I model or esteem.

When in God's will we will definitely hear a reassuring voice coming through. God uses many ways: The written Word, fellow humans may be used to affirm us or even events that happen, which God uses to draw our attention – 'The God incidences'. I have discovered the grave danger that lies in listening to many other voices, when I should be listening to God. This often mutes my ability to decipher what God is saying. Elijah the fiery old testament prophet is said to have listened to several voices: great wind, earthquake and fire before hearing God's own voice that came in a small still voice (1 Kings 19: 11ff). The need to tell the difference is critical in making wise decisions.

In life there is nothing as reassuring as doing something and knowing that it has God's approval, because we are attentive to God. Discerning God's will/voice requires us to apply our hearts to God's word constantly, and remain sensitive to God's constant nudges. One significant discernment process in my life experience has been to do with my work with WIKS (Women's Initiative in Knowledge and Survival), which coincidentally took place while serving here as 'Priest in Residence' in 2002. I heard God calling me to do something beyond just going to school at Yale. Through deep reflection I saw the Lord lead me to bear the burden of very impoverished community on the Western side of Kenya bordering Uganda. It took me two years in wait before something positive happened to show that God really had a hand in the work. Since then I have witnessed God's ever faithfulness as new areas of support and partnerships have slowly but steadily sprung.

I especially invite you to hear God's calling towards the building of Nambale Magnet School, a project of WIKS. WIKS mission is to transform society through empowering vulnerable groups in Nambale and particularly children orphaned through HIV/AIDS pandemic. May the Almighty God enable you to discern His voice and give you strength to follow His will.

In the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Amen.