

Sermon 1-10-10 Psalm 29

Rev. Mark E. Sloss

Psalm 29

- Ascribe to the LORD, you gods,
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.
- ²Ascribe to the LORD the glory due God's name;
worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness.
- ³The voice of the LORD is upon the waters; the God of glory thunders;
the LORD is upon the mighty waters.
- ⁴The voice of the LORD is a powerful voice;
the voice of the LORD is a voice of splendor.
- ⁵The voice of the LORD breaks the cedar trees;
the LORD breaks the cedars of Lebanon;
- ⁶the LORD makes Lebanon skip like a calf,
and Mount Hermon like a young wild ox.
- ⁷The voice of the LORD
bursts forth in lightning flashes.
- ⁸The voice of the LORD shakes the wilderness;
the LORD shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.
- ⁹The voice of the LORD makes the oak trees writhe and strips the forests bare.
And in the temple of the LORD all are crying, "Glory!"
- ¹⁰The LORD sits enthroned above the flood;
the LORD sits enthroned as king forevermore.
- ¹¹O LORD, give strength to your people;
give them, O LORD, the blessings of peace.

Luke 3:21-22

21 Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, 22 and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

The voice of the Lord moves over the waters. Voices shape who we are. Some people unfortunately grow up hearing destructive voices like, "You're no good. I don't want you. You're worthless. You'll never amount to anything." Others hear mostly positive voices like "You're so smart. You've got a real knack for that," or "You're such a good girl."

We hear voices through media and culture to buy this or that product, to support this or that cause, or to behave in a certain set way.

What voices have shaped your self-image? What are the voices saying that keep playing over and over again in your mind? And perhaps more importantly, whose voices are they?

In the midst of all these voices coming both from within and beyond us, it can be a daunting task to sort out the voice of the Lord from among all the others. This is why time for silence and listening prayer can be most helpful. This is why we read and ponder the Holy Scriptures, for they familiarize us with the sound of God's voice, which has power to change both us, and our world.

The Psalms were Jesus' prayer book, and they continue to be ours. The voice of the Lord is a major theme of Psalm 29 that we sung together today. Seven times in 11 verses we repeated, the voice of the Lord this, the voice of the Lord that. The voice of the Lord is a powerful voice, a voice of splendor. The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars of Lebanon. The voice of the Lord makes Mt. Hermon skip like a young wild ox. The voice of the Lord bursts forth in lightning flashes. The voice of the Lord shakes the wilderness, and strips the forest bare.

Most scholars agree that this particular psalm was originally a Canaanite text celebrating Baal or a similar storm God. Yahweh was substituted for the storm god as it made its way into Israel's worship and Psalter. The reasons for doing this I think were twofold. The psalm highlights that the voice of the Lord can be heard in creation and that the voice of the Lord has incredible power to bring change.

In his book, *The Wisdom of Wilderness*, Jerry May tells his story of finding healing and wholeness by spending time alone in nature. I liked what Jerry calls the power of the slowing that happens to him when he spends time in nature. As he described it, I realized that I experience the power of slowing whenever I enter the wilderness of creation too. Something about spending time alone in the woods can slow me down and tune my ear to listen more closely for the voice of the Lord.

One of the reasons that I think many people resist slowing down and listening for the voice of the Lord in their lives is the other characteristic that this psalm highlights. The voice of the Lord has incredible power to bring change. Are we ready? Are we brave enough to let the voice of the Lord strip our forest bare right here in this place, this very morning?

In my imagination I see myself, or any one of us, standing in a grove of cedar trees, trying in some way to hide from the voice of the Lord. We hide behind, because we don't want the lies we've believed in exposed. Maybe we've believed the voice that says the only way to succeed is to be a self-made man or woman. Maybe we've become so accustomed to our pattern of self-critical inner dialogue, that we can't imagine living without it. Maybe we just can't dream of giving up our uniqueness or our trust in some institution outside of ourselves to be our authority. Maybe we've come to believe that who we are is tied up with what we do. Thus, if we're to stop all our busyness, we just might cease to be. Maybe we're sold on the idea that more information and knowledge will finally bring us the secret of a solid happy life. Maybe we find pain so displeasing that we'll employ almost any means to avoid it. Maybe our strategy has to be strong like a cedar and then use our power and toughness to come out on top in life.

We like our lives the way they are just fine, Lord, they work for us, and we really don't need you showing up today to turn our world upside down.

Yet, the psalmist tells us, the voice of the Lord breaks the cedar trees; the Lord breaks the cedars of Lebanon. Today the voice of the Lord breaks all the cedars that we've tried hiding behind.

The voice of the Lord is upon the waters. The voice of the Lord is powerful and full of splendor. The voice of the Lord strips our forest bare. Are your ear attuned to hear it? Can any of us ever truly run and hide from it?

Extroverted Priest, Patrick Hannon, reflected about his weeklong silent retreat at the Abbey of Gethsemane in Kentucky: “When God gets us alone... He will touch our hearts with a love that is to be frank, dangerous. When it becomes God and me alone or God and you alone there’s no place to hide anymore. The truth must and does come out. For seven days it was God Alone. I told a few friends later that it was just God and me, *mano a mano*, a Spanish phrase which implies “hand-to-hand” combat. God and I went at it for seven days. And that is why—at least on one level—it was really crazy of me to go to Gethsemane in the first place. In the end, it was no contest. God won.

I couldn’t run and hide. God had me cornered for seven days. I asked Him, sometimes begged Him, to leave me alone, but He wasn’t listening to any of that. No, Jesus’ Abba, my Abba, kept unpeeling my hands from my face, kept looking at me with piercing eyes, kept saying, “I love you,” hoping, I suppose that if He said it enough times I might believe Him.

The voice of the Lord is upon the waters. The voice of the Lord bursts forth in lightning flashes and shakes the wilderness. The voice of the Lord breaks through all our defenses that we hide behind no matter if they be of the self-sufficient or the insufficient variety. The voice of the Lord strips our forest bare so that we may hear loud and clear that voice from heaven that Jesus heard following his baptism is meant for our ears as well.

You are my Son, You are my Daughter, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased. This voice comes to obliterate all the lies we’ve heard to the contrary in our lives. Say it to yourself, “I am God’s Beloved.” (Go ahead, out loud, I want to hear you). Now turn to your neighbor as say, “You are God’s Beloved.” Let’s be sure that everyone hears it, for this is the very same voice of the Lord that moved over the waters to bring order out of chaos at the beginning of creation. It’s God’s Word for us to not only hear, but embody.

I invite you to close your eyes now, and be in a spirit of prayer, just as Jesus was following his baptism in the Jordan. In your minds eye see the Spirit descending on you in bodily form as a dove, and on all those around you as well. Hear the voice, you are my Beloved Son; you are my Beloved Daughter; with you I am well pleased. Let that message fill your body, mind, heart and spirit. It’s pure gift, pure grace. Let it break any cedars that you’ve tried to hide behind. Let it obliterate the lies you’ve tried living by. There is power in the voice of the Lord, and now that power is within you.

This psalm also guides our response to an eye-opening encounter with the voice of the Lord. It’s the very reason that we gather together here today. And in the temple of the Lord, all are crying, GLORY. Our praising and glorifying of God comes forth from our embodying God’s love. We sing glory, because we’re God’s Beloved, and our worship continues throughout our week as we live each day in this renewed reality: I am God’s Beloved, and each person I encounter is God’s Beloved as well.

May the voice of the Lord guide your living, your loving, and your serving, as I pray with our psalmist: O Lord, give strength to your people; give them, O Lord, the blessings of peace.

AMEN.