

“Is this God Still Speaking?”

by Bil Turner

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Today's message will have a little audience participation. Later you'll be given a chance to vote on some thoughts. Just a show of hands. And there are no right or wrong answers.

Our Old Testament reading today was from Proverbs. The Book of Proverbs is attributed to King Solomon, and it's generally thought of as a book of instructions on how to live a peaceful life, a moral life, a life that is pleasing to God.

The portion of Proverbs we read today concerns wisdom. Wisdom is the speaker, and says “The LORD brought me forth as the first of his works”. So in this telling of the creation story, wisdom predates everything else. And wisdom speaks to us also, “To you, O people, I call out; I raise my voice to all mankind.”

In the church calendar, today is Trinity Sunday - the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. So on this Trinity Sunday it's worth asking, is it possible that this Wisdom that speaks to us in Proverbs is an Old Testament reference to what we would later call the Holy Spirit?

Later in Proverbs, beyond today's reading, there is specific advice about what it is to “be wise”. There is teaching about respect for the poor, the danger of careless speech, the risks of having the wrong kind of friends, and many other examples.

The Gospel reading from John today is part of Jesus' farewell discussion with the disciples and it includes Jesus saying, and I'll paraphrase here - “I have much more to say to you” and he also says “when the spirit comes, he will tell you all things”. So it seems clear the disciples were being told that even after Christ's death, the teaching would continue.

I don't know about you, but to me “when the spirit comes, he will tell you all things” sounds just a little like “God is Still Speaking”

So, in the Old Testament we are given some instructions on how to live a life of wisdom, a life that is pleasing to God, and in the New Testament we are told that more teaching, more wisdom is to come.

Today we're going to collectively consider what the phrase “God is Still Speaking” might mean.

The United Church of Christ began using the phrase God is Still Speaking in 2004, as a sort of campaign slogan. Our denomination felt we needed to specifically spread the word of Christ's extravagant welcome. The UCC wanted it to be made clear that moral thinking wasn't complete back around 400 AD, when the Bible as we know it was codified. The UCC felt it was important

to understand that we don't have a static view of Christianity, stuck in the past, and the phrase God is Still Speaking became part of that effort.

There are several sources that have been put forward as an origin behind the phrase "God is Still Speaking". Some are Bible verses such as the one from John that we read this morning.

One is a sermon delivered as the Pilgrims were departing Holland in 1620 on the way to the New World. In that sermon the Rev. John Robinson said, "God hath yet more light and truth to break forth from his holy word"

Another is a quote from the comedienne, Gracie Allen. She supposedly said, "Never place a period where God has placed a comma". That's a wonderfully serious thought for a comedienne. Just so you know she also said, "I was so startled at being born, that I didn't speak for a year and a half."

What might the phrase God is Still Speaking mean? When we were young, we may have had an image of God as this patriarchal figure that spoke from heaven in a booming voice. I'm not sure that's the kind of speaking that the phrase might mean in this recent context. And I haven't heard that there is currently a serious move to add a new book or two to the Bible. So we won't explore in that direction.

Let's talk about a few examples of what may or may not be God Still Speaking. And here comes the audience participation part. When I ask a question like, "*is it possible that this is God Still Speaking*", if you think it just might be possible, please raise your hand. Remember there are no right or wrong answers.

Each of us as individuals grows in wisdom as we go through life. Our views on many topics evolve as we gain knowledge and experiences. We use the phrase, "no matter where you are on life's journey" Life definitely is a journey and each of us is on that trip. Our understanding of what is wise, of what is the correct path isn't static. We gradually see with changing eyes. Think of all the topics where your views have evolved. "*Is it possible that each of us changes and grows, because God is Still Speaking?*"

Also as individuals we may know the right path, but we forget, we lose our way. Last week, Virginia used a very clear sentence with the children that I loved and I wrote down. She said, "What we do here in worship helps us figure out what to do in regular life". I know why I come to this place on Sunday morning. I'm here for many reasons, but two of the most important are: to recharge my batteries and to repoint my compass. I need to be frequently refreshed. I suspect I am not the only one. "*Is it possible that I, that we, can be refreshed because God is Still Speaking?*"

As a whole congregation we also change and grow. We reviewed our 150-year history not very long ago. Do you think that collectively this congregation has the same views on many topics that

we had even 50 years ago, let alone 150 years ago? Think of social issues or the environmental issues that we are aware of today that we were not aware of years ago. Here are just a few examples. We became an Open and Affirming congregation several years ago, making a public statement that we support and affirm segments of society that have long been discriminated against. Tamara Lipsey was here just a few weeks ago helping us understand how to take better care of our environment. After the school shooting in Parkland Florida, a contingent of members from this congregation went to Washington to the March for Life, to express our views about that tragedy with our physical presence. While we are not perfect, these are examples of our collective growth. *“Is it possible that our congregational growth, followed by our actions, happen because God is Still Speaking?”*

Now, I'll ask you to think of some of the fine moral leaders of today or the recent past. Think of Mahatma Gandhi, or Martin Luther King, the Dalai Lama, Mother Theresa, or Nelson Mandela. These are individuals who in every case stood tall as an example to all of us. They stood as examples of peace, of wisdom, of moral thinking. And in almost every case they did it despite great personal danger.

“Is it possible that these were and are examples of God Still Speaking through individuals?”

I have given you several possible examples of God Still Speaking. Remember that I said that were no right or wrong answers. Many of you have indicated with your raised hands that you thought some of the examples may have truly been God Still Speaking. Reflecting back, all the examples I gave you were activities that were engaged in by ordinary humans.

With that in mind I'll end with a question for you to ponder as you leave today. When we enter the building from the parking lot, we see the large rainbow sign in the back entry that reads God is Still Speaking. Perhaps we usually think of ourselves as observers? Perhaps we are usually just waiting to see something that might be evidence of this Still Speaking God. My question to all of us is this – is that sign not a statement but a call? Do we have a responsibility to be God Still Speaking?”

Amen