

“Did You Hear That?”

Sermon for Citywide Holy Week Service at 12 Noon on Tuesday, April
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At Decatur First United Methodist Church

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Holy Scriptures: John 12: 27-33

I bring you greetings from the members and friends
of First Christian Church of Decatur.

Those who could not be present here are keeping us in their prayers,
that we might be one in Jesus Christ.

Christian unity is our polar star.

Thank you so much for your kind invitation

to be here with you on this Holy Tuesday

to worship the Living Christ with members and
friends

of Decatur First United Methodist Church

and congregations from across the City of Decatur and

DeKalb County.

Thank you, Rev. Dr. David Nagle and Rev. Katie Hinman,

for your kind invitation

and even kinder friendship and leadership in our fair city.

Yesterday we had a fine lunch after worship – I recommend the Pimento cheese –

and I was blessed to break bread with several members of this church.

My newest friend Carol shared that y'all are looking forward to going on a church outing

to watch your associate pastor skate with her roller derby team.

Are you like me? Do you wonder how often Christians get a chance

to cheer on their preacher with cries of *“Go, Katie! Hit ‘em harder!”*

Our sermon title is *“Did You Hear That?”*

The Holy Scripture is from John 12: 27-33.

Listen for the Word of God.

27 *“Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour.* 28 *Father, glorify your name.”* Then a voice came from

heaven, “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.”

29 The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.” 30 Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not for mine.” 31 Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. 32 And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” 33 He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

Did you hear that?

Was that sound you heard holy, from God, a divine gift from above and within?

Was that sound you heard a blessing, a missive, a testament, a sigh too deep for words?

Was that sound you heard a promise, a prayer, a proclamation, a prophecy?

Was that sound you heard a word of preparation, affirmation, or confirmation?

Or was the sound just noise?

How can you tell the difference?

How do you know what voices to heed, to respect, to follow, to trust and obey?

Recently at a sporting event I saw a man wearing a bright orange t-shirt that said,

“I always do whatever the voices in my wife’s head tell me to do.”

Today is the first day of Passover.

Our scripture from John’s Gospel takes place during Passover as well.

Passover is a spiritual, liturgical expression of remembering the promise of God.

The Lord will provide.

As Jesus of Nazareth celebrates Passover with his friends,

He is fully aware that He is the fulfillment of the promise.

The Lord will provide.

Here is the Messiah, the Lamb of God,

provided by the One who Created and Creates for our eternal salvation.

As Jesus prepares for Passover, he must make the ultimate choice.

The cross on Calvary awaits, as does suffering,

as does certain death, as does the hope of resurrection.

The Lord will provide.

As Jesus contemplates the choice he must make,
he speaks aloud what is going through his mind,
what is heavy on his heart,
what is both troubling and calming his soul.

In the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke,

Jesus seriously considers whether he should “*let this cup pass*”,

praying aloud, “*Abba, if you are willing, remove this cup from me;*

yet, not what I want, but what you want.”

However, in the Gospel of John there is no such wavering;

no wondering what might be just ahead, around the corner;

no contemplation of wandering away from what must be.

Jesus says, “*Now my soul is troubled.*

And what should I say—‘Father, save me from this hour’?

No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour.

Father, glorify your name.”

Then a voice came from heaven,

“I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” (John 12: 27-28)

Jesus hears God’s confirmation.

One could say that Jesus was confident in his mission, his message, his Messiahship.

We sense his confidence, his faith, his determination, his trust

because he said so himself that he did not need to hear God’s confirmation.

The voice of God was not speaking to Jesus.

The voice of God was speaking to those in his midst, to his people...to us.

Did you hear that?

“The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder.

Others said, *“An angel has spoken to him.”*

Jesus answered, *“This voice has come for your sake, not for mine.”* (John 12: 29-30)

“Not all heard the voice, of course.

Scripture and experience teach us

that events which are for some people

occasions of God's self-disclosure

are for others natural occurrences."^[1]

Did you hear that?

What did you hear? Did you hear God's self-disclosure, or a natural occurrence?

Someone said they heard the voice of God saying,

"I have glorified [my name], and I will glorify it again."

Someone else nearby just dismissed the sound,

practically, scientifically, easily, secularly dismissing it,

explaining that the sound was only rolling thunder.

How do you discern whether the sound you hear is holy?

How do you know when the sounds you hear are holy,

whether the voice or voices you hear are helpful or hurtful?

What is your favorite, most trusted Litmus Test?

My desktop dictionary defines a litmus test as:

1. A test for chemical acidity or basicity using litmus paper.
2. A test that uses a single indicator to prompt a decision.

I am blessed to be a member of a civic service club called Rotary International.

Rotarians draw deep upon the **The Four-Way Test**.

The Four Way Test, which has been translated into more than 100 languages,

asks the following questions:

Of the things we think, say or do

1. Is it the TRUTH?
2. Is it FAIR to all concerned?
3. Will it build GOODWILL and BETTER FRIENDSHIPS?
4. Will it be BENEFICIAL to all concerned?

Another positive Litmus Test is whether the voices you hear and are asked to heed

will direct your life to be harmful or hurtful.

For example, a surgeon must make an incision to operate,

and her craft leaves a scar and the necessity of painful therapy,

yet the hurt inflicted is a part of the healing.

On the other hand, a soul who is self-centered or selfish or self-righteous

may seek to intentionally harm others

for the sake of perpetuating a cause or idea.

Dare to ask whether at the core of the voice you hear, will it lead you to heal or harm?

As people of faith we are invited to turn to the Holy Scriptures

for blessed guidance on how to discern the difference

between noise and voice,

between sounds and spiritual direction.

God, who loves you and knows your name and your needs, calls out to you.

You know God's voice because you know God.

Jesus says, *"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me."*

The better we get to know God, to love God, to serve and follow God's ways,

the more clearly we will recognize God's voice.

God's voice is the movement and expression of the Holy Spirit -- the Spirit of Love --

so we can affirm and confirm that the voice of God is the sound of love.

Love is the Litmus Test.

Allow me to encourage us to apply our Litmus Tests

to those in our world today who proclaim that they hear the voice of God,

and tell us that they know exactly what you and I should do

and how we should live and serve.

This Holy Week and beyond let us practice some holy listening.

Some Holy rollers tell us to prepare for the rapture, for the end of days.

Some who call for a Holy Jihad advocate violence as a solution to misunderstandings.

Some who call themselves holy prophets proclaim a gospel

that in no way reflects the God of love and forgiveness

I have personally encountered.

For example, the small, Topeka-based Westboro Baptist Church

may be protected by the Constitution of the United States

yet that does not mean their words or placards

which read “God Hates Gays” and “Jews Killed Christ”

while they demonstrate at the funerals

of our servicemen and servicewomen
who gave the ultimate sacrifice
are in the remotest way holy.

Here in the south we like to say that *“love is blind, but the neighbors aren’t.”*

We see what is really going on.

And if we don’t, if we misread a detail, if we mistake the holiness in our midst,

trust that those whom you trust will get it.

Trust that those who truly, deeply love you

will share and be the Good News for you.

Sometimes we need to heed the insights and observations of those whom we do trust,

those who have our best interest at heart,

those who care and listen,

those who are connected to the holy,

those who know and follow the Good Shepherd,

those who discern the difference between rolling thunder and the voice of God.

Maybe we could expand our southern expression

from love is blind to love is deaf,

but the neighbor’s aren’t.

Connecting to the holy voice of God

will make you a better person and build a better world.

Integrate into your daily life the steady drumbeat of God's Word.

The Lamb of God trusts the confirming Word of the Lord, who is our Shepherd,

"The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters."

(Psalm 23: 1-2)

The Lord will provide.

The providential care of the Lord starts with the Word.

The Lord provides a Word that can sound so much like rolling thunder,

like the laughter of a child,

like the pause between the notes,

like the steady breathing of your beloved,

like the cries for freedom and justice from the oppressed,

like a still, small voice
whispering in your ear,

saying,

"I have glorified Jesus, and I

will glorify Him again.”

Yes, you heard that.

All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!

[1] Craddock, et al, Preaching the New Common Lectionary, 1986,
Page 101.