

Livestreaming at 10:25 AM on Facebook: [First Christian Church Decatur](#)

[Click here to see the worship bulletin.](#)

“Did You Hear That?”

Sermon for First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Decatur, Georgia
Season of Lent, Sunday, March 21, 2021
James L. Brewer-Calvert, Senior Pastor,

Holy Scriptures: Jeremiah 31: 31-34 John 12: 27-33

Jeremiah 31:31-34

³¹ The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. ³² It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband,^[a] says the Lord.

³³ But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ³⁴ No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, “Know the Lord,” for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

Footnotes

- a. [Jeremiah 31:32](#) Or *master*

John 12:20-33

²⁰ Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. ²¹ They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” ²² Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. ²³ Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴ Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. ²⁵ Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶ Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.

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^[a] to myself.” ³³ He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

Footnotes

- a. John 12:32 Other ancient authorities read *all things*

“Did You Hear That?”

Listen for the Word of God.

Jesus said,

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.”

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?

Once, at a sporting event,

I saw a guy wearing a bright orange t-shirt that said,

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

Each moment we draw nearer to the conclusion of Lent and the joy of Easter dawn.

But we are not there yet.

Holy Week approaches.

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr never forgot that we had to go to calvary,
had to pay the cost of discipleship, had to do the hard work of Christian service,
before we find the joy of the empty tomb
and feast at the Heavenly banquet.

Dr. King said,

“For the crown we are to wear there is first the cross we must bear.

Bear it, for what you sow, so shall you reap.

Bear it, for truth pressed to earth will rise again.

Bear it, for the moral arc of the universe is long but it bends toward justice.”

We prepare our souls for Palm Sunday

and the Passion of Passover, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday.

We prepare ourselves to embody the costs of discipleship.

Fear not, my friends.

The Lord will provide, starting with the Word.

The Word we hear, the Word we receive, tells us this is the Way.

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

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

Jeremiah spoke of the promise of God’s love.

He said that God said, *“...this is the covenant*

that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord:

I will put my law within them,

and I will write it on their hearts;

and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.” -- Jer. 31: 33

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.

God’s gift is the Messiah, the Lamb of God,

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

The Lord will provide.

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.
There’s 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.
Check this out: here is a biblical nuance that is life changing.
Our life changing.
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."

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

Did you hear that?

What did you hear?

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

One witness said they heard the voice of God saying,

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

Someone else nearby dismissed the sound,

practically, 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 of the voice you hear whether at the core:
will you lead me 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 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.

As we prepare to move through Holy Week and beyond
let us practice some holy listening.

Yesterday the Atlanta Journal-Constitution mentioned that
*"Christian leaders are grappling with what message they will deliver on Sunday
and how the faith tackles such issues
as racism, gender bias and sexuality."*

Tell you what I hear.

The holy word I hear loud and clear this week is *AGAIN*.

"Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet"...and it has a constant refrain – *AGAIN*.

Again we are witnesses of attacks on the civil rights and human rights of God's children.
Again.

My parents marched and fought for freedom and voting rights,

to end the VietNam War,
for racial integration and to abolish Jim Crow laws.

My brothers and wife and fellow followers of God and I
marched and fought for dismantling nuclear weapons,
to support of the Equal Rights Amendment,
to enable gay marriage and trans rights.
to divest from corporations
supporting apartheid in South Africa.

Marching and singing,
*"Somebody tell me what's the word?
Tell me woman, what you heard
'Bout Johannesburg?"* – Gil Scott-Heron

And now my children and their generation
are marching and advocating for freedom and voting rights,
to defeat suppression of Black and LatinX voters
and prevent senseless gun violence.

Keep proclaiming the Word we hear, again and again,
words that bear repeating,
words that speak to the souls of today's generations,
words that call us to be grace personified.
What is grace but love in action.

Did you hear that?

Sometimes, oftentimes, the Church of Jesus Christ gets hard of hearing.
We get what my wife says I have, selective hearing, only heeding what I want to hear.
To the cries of the suffering, we grow deaf, numb, callous.
We go off script.

*"I think the church is following a script
of what they perceive American Christians should believe,"*
said The Rev. Catherine Renken,
Pastor, Kirkwood Presbyterian Church in Kennesaw GA.
*Instead, [the Church] should "really reflect on who Jesus called us to be
... We have so much work to do
just agreeing that yes, we should care for the immigrant.
Yes, we should stand up
for people in our community – our brothers and sisters –
who are being harassed.
That is simply not OK."*

As you know, at the drop of a hat
our congregation opens our doors wide for the community.
One act of grace is to provide safe space for voting,
for elections local and federal.
We welcome folks, make sure there is plenty of TP in the restrooms
and overflowing baskets of candy and granola bars in the lobby.
When the voting lines are long,
sometimes a line of bold souls out the door and down the sidewalk,
we hand out water bottles and offer words of encouragement.
There is a possibility, come the next election in Georgia,
that if you and I give a thirsty soul something cool to drink
or take souls to the polls on a Sunday
we may be charged with a crime.

In capital buildings in 43 states across our nation, including the Georgia Capital,
more than 253 bills restricting voting access
are being carried over, pre-filed, or introduced.

Have you heard the Word?

Democracy is under assault.

Voting rights are being suppressed.

The voices of American citizens are being shut out or shut down or shut up,
when now, more than ever, we need every voice to be heard.

Did you hear that?

Was that passing thunder, or a holy message to speak truth to principalities and powers?

In 30 capital buildings in these United States,
bills are being considered that criminalize being trans,
bills to punish doctors and guidance counselors
and even parents who support young people
seeking to affirm & embody their true gender identity.

Did you hear that?

Was that a call to raise a hue and cry, or just some noise?

A 21-year-old buys a handgun
and later that same day
allegedly shoots and kills 8 of our neighbors in Georgia,
6 of whom are Asian women.

Here our grief for such loss has a name and a face.
Two teenage boys will never hear their mother, Hyun Jung Grant,
 tell them every night,
 as is her maternal and spiritual discipline, *"I love you."*
Here meet racism, misogyny, and violence.
Here we see the ripple effect of the damages of white supremacy and nationalism.
Here hopelessness, despair, anger gain easy access to a weapon of destruction.

We can do something.
We must.
We shall.

Did you hear that?

You might hear someone say, *"This is not who we are."*
Baloney
This is exactly who we are.
A cartoon in the "New Yorker"
 shows a boy and girl in their bedroom.
They have totally trashed it.
Broken toys and shredded clothes are all over the place.
Their mom has stepped into the room and is taking it all in.
One of the kids looks at her and says, *"This is not who we are!"*

Denial is not a river in Egypt.
This is who we are.
"You are what your record says you are," said Coach Bill Parcells.
This is our record, this is the bed we made, this is who we are,
 and this is where we find ourselves right now, right here.

So, my friends, what are we going to do about it?
To whom are we going to listen?

The Litmus Test is Love.

We look to God's Word to us, for us, through us.
The Word of our Loving and Gracious God may seem rare in these days,
 yet God's Word is real, it is live, and it is kicking.
We are witnesses to the Word.
We are followers of the Word.
We are bearers of the Word, a Word that is trustworthy, holy, for all souls.

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!