

Kimberly Reinholtz

Grace and Holy Trinity Church

April 17, 2016

John 10:22-30

In my house we have an on-going game that that we play with our 2 year old. It's not really a game I guess, more of a constant state of awareness that is sometimes entertaining. Audrey says "I hear something" and holds her hand up to her ear. We say, "What do you hear?" Sometimes it's an airplane, the wind or our dog Indiana. But many times it's one or the other of us in another room. She will laugh and say "It's Daddy", or "It's Mommy" accordingly. She knows our voices of course, but usually the sound she hears isn't our voice, but something else we are doing, the jingle of our keys, the way we blow our nose, or our steps down the hallway. She knows it is us, because she hears us.

When Jesus explains to those gathered around him, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them and they follow" I imagine that his disciples knew him in much the same way as our daughter knows us, after all Jesus and the 12 traveled together, shared a common purse, and we assume that they shared accommodations, but we know they shared meals together. When you live in close proximity to one another you begin to know one another. So it wouldn't be hard to imagine Simon Peter, Andrew, James, John or any of the others knowing Jesus voice and his other sounds too, They would know what it sounded like when Jesus cleared his throat in the morning, if he snored or not, and the unique rhythm of his gait. They would have easily been able to recognize their teacher and Lord. Or so it would seem based on this chapter of John's Gospel.

That wasn't the case in the resurrection though, even those who knew Jesus best, didn't immediately recognize him after the resurrection. In John's gospel all of the accounts of disciples meeting the newly risen Christ involve listening but not hearing Jesus' voice- Mary doesn't know Jesus until he calls her by name, the 12 in the upper room don't recognize Jesus until they put their hands in his side and see his wounded hands, on the beach in Galilee the Lord first calls to the disciples and they don't recognize him yet again. They knew him, they traveled with him, learned from him, and followed him for years and they didn't recognize him by his voice.

But in this earlier chapter of John's gospel Jesus says that those who believe, those who recognize his voice, those are his sheep. Those are the Father's sheep. Those are the ones who will be saved. What hope to do we have if even those who were closest to Jesus don't know his voice or recognize him in the days immediately following the resurrection? It certainly seems that Jesus is showing us that we aren't worthy to be his sheep, especially if even his closest friends don't recognize him in the first 50 days, so what's the point in even trying?

The point is this, that even though we don't know the physical manifestation of Jesus of Nazareth as incarnate man, like the person who Philip, Judas, Jesus' brother John, and the others knew. Who we know is as the resurrected and ascended Christ who was and is and is to come, who is one with the Father.

Now I will be the first to admit that as a woman and priest I have had my share of theological conversations about God the Father. I have studied feminist theology and in my personal reflections I find Parent God an easier image to carry. It doesn't hold the same masculine versus feminine male versus female dichotomy which can lead to

power struggles and to the belief that women are somehow less than men. After years of thoughtful reflection and study, I have come to believe that God is in reality gender neutral, as is reflected in Genesis' first chapter "Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.' " but throughout every generation humanity has used images and metaphors to try to understand divinity. Jesus uses the Father image in today's Gospel so today I hold that image in my heart and ponder it in divine love.

What does it mean to know the Father's voice? What does it mean to know Jesus' voice? If I have never physically heard the sounds escaping from a vocal cords of the Palestinian Rabbi in the first century, or encountered a burning bush? How will I know when God is speaking to me?

How do we know God?

I think we know God in much the same way that Audrey knows her parents and that the disciples knew Jesus. When we live with God, we begin to know how God works. We pick up clues as to how God is at work in the world and we recognize the Love of God in the face of all that is unGodly in the world.

How do we live with God?

We come here. We pray and sing and worship the Lord God. We engage with the sacraments. We are baptized, confirmed, reaffirmed. We are invited to receive Holy Communion and take into ourselves Holy

Food and Drink of new and unending life in Him. We engage in confession and forgiveness with one another and ask for absolution from our sins so that we might reconcile ourselves to God as well.

But we do not leave God behind when we leave this place. As ministers of the Good News in the world, we share the peace of the Lord with the world around us which is broken by greed and hate and malice and evil. We are the Good which God has given to the world. We are the agents of change which will bring about glimpses of the Kingdom of Heaven to those who do not yet know the infinite, life-giving and powerful Love of God.

We know God because we live with God day in and day out. We know God because we hear God in our very breath. We know God because we hear God in our heart beat. We know God because we hear God in the laughter of Children or the tears of those who mourn or in any number of ways that speak to us as individuals. We know God in moment that he calls out our name like Mary at the tomb, we know God in the moment that he breaks through the locked doors like he did in the upper room, we know God like Peter did when he jumped into the sea to swim ashore after God told them to cast their nets to the other side.

We know God because God knows us. God speaks to us each in our own way. We just have to be listening for the little things. What is the equivalent of the keys in the door, or the paws on the floor for you? Are you still listening intently for God in your life in the midst of all the distractions? Are you able to say “I hear something” and know that the “something” you hear is God?

I struggle with this, trust me, more often than not I don't hear the airplanes, trucks or ducks that Audrey hears. Sometimes I have no idea what she is talking about and when that happens I am reminded that throughout the centuries those who have heard the voice of God most readily have struggled to live with God in their daily lives. Some like the Desert Fathers and Mothers abandoned their "lives" in search of Holy Otherness, others like Mother Theresa of Calcutta and The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr have found God's voice in the messiness of human suffering. For most of us God's voice is found in din of the everyday life. Right now I hear God in the hardly ever quiet moments of motherhood- when a little prophetic voice interrupts the business of life's minutiae with "I hear something". God's voice is there for me to hear and I just needed to recognize its presence on a more regular basis.