

Our Communicating God

Acts 16:9-15

John 14:23-26

Our ability to speak is a complex and miraculous thing. Generally we take it for granted. The coordination of our mouths, lips, tongue as breath flows over our vocal cords. We know Jesus spoke when He walked on earth but what about now, God speaking to us today? Is that even possible?

We can often hear people say “God said to me”. For years I found this a stumbling block. Way back in the 80’s here in church we were having a joint service with the Baptists and one of them said to me. “If I can hear God speaking to me then I’m sure He speaks to you”. I was flummoxed! Really! I had to think about this! In my usual analytical way, I’m a scientist at heart, I thought “well, we believe in the Holy Trinity, it’s the name of this church! The 3 in One, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, a circle of self giving love. They must communicate with each other and as God loves us, it makes sense that He would want to communicate with us too!

Nowadays I believe God loves to communicate with us but His ways of communicating vary greatly from person to person and we often don’t find it easy to tune in.

Our Acts reading starts with a wonderful example of God’s varied communication. Verse 9-10 “During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him “Come over to Macedonia and help us”. After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them”.

How did St Paul know that this vision was from God and not just an ordinary dream? I don’t think he was 100% sure the next morning but his instinct told him make plans to go to Macedonia. Confirmation came when he met Lydia and she and her household were baptised. So let’s not think Paul was an expert at noticing God’s communication and it’s something beyond us.

The Bible is called God’s Word. We only have to look at the first chapter of Genesis. As early as verse 2 “God said “Let there be light”, and there was light”. Actually I don’t think for a moment a great booming voice was heard across the universe! Although it could have been! Nothing is impossible for God...

When we talk of God “speaking” my understanding is that it is very rare to hear an audible voice. Maybe we use the word “speaking” as shorthand for God’s connection with us, His presence and action creating and sustaining all life right up to this day and continuing into the future.

Our creator God, desires to communicate with you and me. He desires to be in relationship with us. Relationships are all about communication. Terry and I would have a pretty strange relationship if we didn’t talk to each other! However Terry, cheekily says “it would be more peaceful!”

So how can we recognise God communicating with us?

In our 21st century world we are continually bombarded by voices from every direction. “Wear this and everyone will notice you”, “eat this and you’ll be much more healthy”, TV, social media, not to mention our own internal dialogue. How can we distinguish God’s voice, which is often a still, small voice, amongst all the background noise?

In my experience it's probably more a "sensing" than a hearing. It's the Holy Spirit within us, who we are marked with at Baptism, He enables us to notice God speaking to us. As our gospel reading told us "The Holy Spirit will teach you all things and will remind you of all I have said to you." (John 14:26). We speak of "nudges of the Spirit", feeling words of scripture are meant just for us, a friend speaking words that are in line with a Bible passage you have just read, thinking about a friend and they text you. We call these God incidences. Not to mention dreams and visions. God can speak through the beauty of nature, art, music, poetry. I've even heard of seeing a word written on someone's forehead. I spoke to a lady the other day who could occasionally feel Jesus holding her hand. And don't forget angels, and of course sermons, the list goes on.

Recognising communication from God takes practice. We will make mistakes but the more we expect God to communicate with us and choose to be open the more we will begin to recognise divine communication.

Pete Greig in his book "How to hear God" offers some helpful guidance.

ABC God's voice will be Affirming, Biblical, Christ like.

Affirming: Is what you sense encouraging, strengthening, even if it's instructions it won't sound harsh or accusing. It will always be life giving.

Biblical: God's word to us will always be consistent with the broad teaching and witness of scripture. He is always willing to give us confirmation of what we think we hear.

Christlike: Is what we sense consistent with the character, mission and message of Jesus? God's word will always draw us closer to Him and lead to greater fruit of the Spirit (Gal:5,22).

In my experience thoughts that come from God are fresh and new, they don't sound like my internal dialogue. There is a sense they come from outside of me. But they are momentary, it's our choice to catch hold of them, ponder them and obey them. It's easy to ignore them and think "Oh that's just my imagination or wishful thinking."

If you ever sense a voice in you saying "You aren't good enough! What a failure! That will not be God communicating with you. Love, kindness and compassion are His ways. It may be the voice of a critical parent, or teacher from the past that you have internalised. Or even the enemy who can put negative thoughts in our minds trying to draw us away from Jesus.

I hope you've heard something today that excites and encourages you. Communication is always 2way. The more we approach Jesus, in prayer and worship, the more we will hear Him communicating with us. There is nothing better!

Father, thank you that you love to communicate to us and speak through us. Please open our ears, eyes, hearts and minds to what you want to say. Make us more discerning, so we can know your love and allow it to flow through us to others.
Amen.