

The Voice You Hear

Matthew 3:13-17

We all have “voices” that live in our heads. And it has nothing to do with mental illness or any abnormality about us. We often don’t pay much attention to the “conversations” roiling around in our heads. When we think, particularly introspectively, we tend to notice them –the passionate voice, the inner child’s voice, our “adult” voice, the deliberating voice....the critical voice. That’s the voice we notice more than any, isn’t it? That critical voice that can pound on us in the night, disturbing our sleep and reviewing our life’s scroll, stopping mercilessly on every perceived mistake we have ever made – or at least the ones we think we made that day.

Those with some form of anxiety experience this more often than others. But every person at one time or another has experienced the disapproving voice of their inner Critic admonishing, doubting, diminishing, pounding.

Psychologists often say that our strongest inner voices are ones we have absorbed or usurped from those of our parents. If we had a particularly critical parent or one that made us feel “less than,” we carry that same voice in our heads as an adult, continuing to label ourselves in the very same way.

Likewise, if we had a nurturing, compassionate parent, we may be inclined to comfort ourselves and help ourselves feel better.

In truth, our inner world is full of vibrant conversation! This is why “self-talk” works so well in helping us to tamp down critical voices in favor of more nurturing ones that we deliberately insert to “change the conversation”!

But no matter how much self-talk we employ, nothing beats God talk! God’s voice is the ultimate conversation changer! And in fact, an absolute game changer when it comes to our health and wellbeing. Those who spend time talking to God – whether in prayer, in everyday life, or in meditation, those who tune in to God’s voice during times of struggle, hurt, or trouble, always seem stronger and more resilient. Why? Because God’s voice is a voice of total acceptance and blessing.

Too often in our lives, we seek approval – from caregivers, from parents, from spouses, from others. It’s no wonder our voices become so neurotic! When we ride the “approval” train, we are seeking a temporary “fix” of feel-good. We aren’t removing judgment. We are simply encouraging ourselves to listen to a different voice!

But when we listen to God’s voice, we hear pleasure – because God looks at us with the eyes of a loving Creator, who adores creation! God guides gently, forgives abundantly, accepts authentically, and blesses truly.

You never have to “hide” like Adam did in the garden or like you may have when you snatched that cookie out of your parents’ jar without permission, fearing the judgment that will follow.

God doesn’t work that way. Those who grew up hearing that God is a punishing, fearful God – I’m here to tell you that is wrong! God simply doesn’t operate that way!

Fortunately, God looks at us with merciful eyes. God can see us shivering in our shoes, battering ourselves with our Inner Critic, feeling awful about ourselves, wondering if we could ever be forgiven. And God bestows upon us – mercy.

That’s what Jesus made sure of! In our scripture for today, we see a glimpse of that glowing, affirming God, as Jesus opts to be baptized by John in the Jordan River.

Jesus entreats John to baptize him. Just as Jesus comes up from the water, we learn that “suddenly, the heavens were opened. . . .he saw God’s Spirit descending and alighting on him. . . .and a voice said, ‘This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.’”

We’ve seen that brilliantly lit cloud cover of God numerous times in the scriptures. This time, it’s accompanied by a voice – one that is full of pleasure! Jesus had chosen well and had willingly stood before God, ready to carry out God’s plan and purpose.

God was confirming Jesus’ decision and bestowing great favor upon him! We saw God do something similar with Abel’s sacrificial gift. It’s as though God was smiling.

That doesn’t mean that God condones all the mistakes that we make and negative things that we do. In these cases, the Holy Spirit comes to guide us in the right direction and help us to make amends. But even in our darkest hours, God does not desert us. We know this from the story of Jonah.

God sits with us when we pout, holds us when we rage, comforts us in sorrow, and carries us when we feel too weak to go further.

But every time we turn to God, God is there ready to receive our prayers, our petitions, our laments, and our confessions – and when we offer them up to be sacrificed before him, I think God smiles and says, “I am pleased with you.”

We don’t need to be perfect to be pleasing to God. We only need to be ourselves and to allow God into our lives.

When we do, the overwhelming voice we will hear in our heads will not be the Critic, or the Basher, or the Worrier, or the Anxious, but the Voice of God saying, “You’re going to be ok.” “I love you, I’m with you, and I am so pleased with you”!

I want you to close your eyes for a moment and hear that Voice of God. Pay attention to the Holy Spirit surrounding you right now, and hear God’s voice saying those words to you:

“You are my beloved, and I am pleased with you.”

When you do, I know you will feel it! The warmth washing over you. The stress running out of you. The anxiety leaving you. The affirmation lifting you, healing you, cleansing you, and restoring you.

That is the Voice of God.

Today, as you go from this place, I encourage you to stay in conversation with God – by whatever means works best for you. Because whenever God is speaking – your heart will listen.

God’s voice is more powerful and potent than any you could possibly have “living in your psyche.” God’s blessing upon you will be more potent and transformative in your life than anything you could possibly do or change on your own.

May God’s voice of blessing surround you like dew on flowers, and may you feel the love and grace of Christ always in your heart.