

## A Reflection from Revd Jane for Mothering Sunday ~ The Fourth Sunday of Lent

The reading we had from Luke is one of course that we would normally think about at Advent and Christmas - but March 25th is the day that we think of the angel visiting Mary and telling her that she will have a baby, and becoming pregnant by the Holy Spirit - the word that was given becoming flesh as Mary received and accepted that word.

This word to Mary was, of course, very specific, but throughout the Bible we see people hearing from God - God speaks to them and then they respond. As Tozer says, 'God is not silent. It is the nature of God to speak'. Deuteronomy 8 v 3 says we don't live by bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord' - I'm sure you recognize it - it's the verse Jesus quoted during his temptation in the wilderness. I don't think it's by chance therefore, that the first temptation in the Garden targeted the voice of God - 'Did God really say...? If this is the very best food that our spirit can feed on then it is no wonder that it is was, and always is, being undermined. Why would Satan want us to feed on it?

Likewise, what did God say on the Mount of Transfiguration? 'Always listen to him' - to Jesus...continuous - not just one off, not just once in a while, but **always** listen to him. Perhaps the point is, and the question we need to ask ourselves, is are we expectant that God will speak to us?

So how does God speak to us? God speaks to us in many ways – for instance, through the Bible - his word; through others; through dreams; through visions; through an audible voice. Sometimes we can get an impression – thoughts given us by the Spirit. Some find that God speaks much more clearly to them through art and creative things. Not many of us have an angelic visitation - but some do! The most common way is of course through the Bible. The Bible is our plumb line so everything we hear is tested against scripture.

Someone Andy and I know always says, 'you want to hear God talk to you? You want to hear God speak to you? Then open his mouth!' - And he opens the Bible.

When we read the Bible are we expecting God to speak to us through it? Do we read the Bible with the Holy Spirit, prayerfully? Do we know and recognize the Lord's voice as it says in John 10: 1 – 6? God never stops speaking to us or wanting to speak to us – perhaps we just don't give him the time to listen to what he is saying. Perhaps we haven't tuned into his frequency. Can we use this Lent to practice listening to his voice and have an expectancy that he wants to speak to us? I would encourage you to practice until you do recognize his voice. If Andy phoned me I would recognize instantly it was him because I know his voice, I'm in a relationship with him - and that's what it is supposed to be like with those who love the Lord.

When God spoke to Mary through the angel he told her something very specific – that she would literally be carrying God in her womb. When Jesus spoke to Andrew and Simon Peter, James and John, he called them to follow him. So often we want to be called to something specific, we want God to call us into a particular role or service, yet the call on all our lives of those who follow Jesus is to do just that – follow him - pure and simple. The most important thing we can do is to live the life of one called by Jesus to be his follower. As we read the gospel of Mark through Lent, we are urged by Mark the whole time – are **you** - am I - on the Way? Are **you** following? Lent is a good time to actually take some time to reflect 'what is my walk with the Lord like?

As we follow Jesus to the cross through Lent, we learn what it is to lay our own dreams and hopes down, our own plans and ambitions because just as Jesus told his disciples that his food - the sustenance for his life - was to do the will of the Father, so it should be for us. The call of James and

John, Simon and Andrew, is the same call we hear today from Jesus – follow me! 1 Peter 1 says that we are called to be holy just as the One who has called us is holy. (Pause)

For a time, Mary carried the physical body of God incarnate, but as Christians we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Romans 8 tells us that for all those who belong to Christ, the same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in us. We are carriers of the Presence of God - how does that and how should that impact the way we live? For all who declare Jesus as Lord - **God dwells within us**. These are powerful statements. I encourage you to tell yourself daily 'the Holy Spirit lives in me', and let your mind be renewed to that wonderful truth as it changes from head knowledge to heart knowledge. Let the revelation of those words hit you - and change you as God speaks to you.

And perhaps that's another question to ask as we walk through Lent. Are we willing to change as we follow Jesus or have we become complacent and comfortable? Have we set ourselves against things, not because God has said anything but because 'we are comfortable thank you very much and we don't want to change our life' - we don't actually want to take the time to listen to God's voice because... well...frankly...he might want us to do something differently and so... no thank you! That's a question only you and God know the answer to.... (Pause to think of what you might say to Jesus if he asked that question)

These things I have been speaking about aren't just at an individual level. They are also at a corporate level, a community level. How as a church, a community of believers do we hear God's voice? We want to know the Spirit's guidance as we go forward, so how do we hear what he is saying?

As Richard Foster says, 'When the Spirit brings unity it goes beyond agreement because there is an understanding that we have heard from the Lord'. Unity rather than majority rule is the principle of corporate guidance. It comes through fasting, praying and worshipping the Lord together. In other churches Andy and I have been involved in, when there is an expectancy the Lord is beginning to reveal something new, there are times of coming together to pray and fast. Of course, there are always those who resist that, **and** you have to be willing to come with a blank piece of paper - everything laid down so the Lord can speak - but it's then that there comes an understanding of what it means to maintain unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

And that's because it goes beyond wanting what I want, or what you want because whatever we do, we want to do it for the glory of God as it says in 1 Corinthians 10. The more we know the Lord, the more we listen to his voice, learn his ways, the more we know what pleases him, then the more the fruit of the Spirit grows in us, just as it grew in Mary's womb. What is it God wants to birth in us today? What is it God wants to bring to birth in the life of our church here at Fillongley?

God never leads us in ways that are contrary to his word - we test things, of course we do - and if we think that what we have heard does not match the plumb line of his word then I don't believe we have heard from God....so we get before him again - individually and corporately. There are many other spirits trying to get our attention not just the Holy Spirit - so we test the spirits.

God wants us to live our lives with new levels of trust, faith and expectancy, to be excited about what he wants to do in our day. Jesus has promised that for all who believe in him he is with us always. Let us rejoice in that knowledge knowing that if we are faithful and steadfast in following him the best is yet to come, amen.

### **Prayer:**

Lord we thank you that you know each one of us by name. Help us to be faithful in our walk with you as you call us to follow you. Teach us what it means to be carriers of your Presence so that we live expectantly trusting in your promise that you are with us always. **Amen.**