

Hebrews 1:1-4
(Deuteronomy 18:15-22; John 1:1-5, 9-14)
“Prophet”

Introduction

Over the last half of the 20th century, the silence of God was a significant theme in literature and film, art and music. After the optimism of the 19th and early 20th centuries, two bloody world wars and the cruelty of both fascist and communist dictatorships contributed to a growing pessimism that there could actually be a God who reigns over human history, and an attendant skepticism at the possibility of life having any ultimate meaning or significance. The cultural revolution of the 1960s, the disillusionment of Viet Nam and Watergate, fed the God is Dead movement in theology.

The question was recently revived in the days following 9/11, throughout this long war, and is being voiced even now in homes torn apart by conflict, sickness or any of the other ways that life catches us and turns our lives inside out. It is surely being asked in homes touched by the terrorist attacks in Mumbai: Where is God? Why doesn't he answer us when we cry out to him? Why this unbearable silence in the face of our pain?

But when we turn from the modern and post-modern cultural perspectives to the perspective of the Bible, the question changes: the so-called silence of God is seen as a testimony, not to God's silence, but to humanity's profound spiritual deafness. God has been speaking all along, and our rebellion against him has made us deaf to his voice, blind to his messages written in the universe all around us. God has been speaking all throughout human history, and his word has even taken human form, when in the midst of history, the eternal Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us (John 1:14).

This is at the heart of the meaning of the Advent season we enter this morning: humanity waits for God to speak, to reveal himself, to save us from bondage to futility and death. And God does not disappoint. He always comes, is always there at the right time. Yet most miss him completely. The question is whether we are able to see him acting in history and to hear him speaking into our deepest longings and needs. How does he do that? How are we to see him act and hear him speak?

Body

1. God has been speaking all along through the creation (Psalm 1; Romans 1).

An artist is known in his art, the craftsman in what his hands have made. God reveals himself through the universe. This is my Father's world / And to my listening ear / All nature sings, while round me rings / The music of the spheres. Are your eyes open, your ears tuned to the word being spoken to you day by day through the testimony of the universe?

2. God has been speaking all along through our consciences (Romans 2).

Our consciences also testify to the way that God wants us to live. We share with all people everywhere a basic understanding of the law that God has written on our hearts. But, because of our sin and rebellion, this voice becomes muted and twisted.

We debate particulars. Is there no one who will speak clearly for God?

3. God has been speaking all along through his prophets (Hebrews 1).

What they said not only had the "ring of truth," but also had to meet a stringent test, particularly if there was a predictive element to the prophecy. If they predicted something that did not come true, or said what turned out to be a lie, and were found out, they were put to death. (If that same test were applied today, we'd have far fewer so-called prophets in the church and on television, claiming to have a "word from the Lord.") turned out to be a lie, and were found out, they were put to death. (If that same test were applied today, we'd have far fewer so-called prophets in the church and on television, claiming to have a "word from the Lord.")

One feature of God's word through his prophets was that it often cut against the grain. The false prophet said, "Peace," when there was no peace. He was more concerned with how people felt about themselves and what they thought of him than with what kind of people they were or of what God thought of him. The true prophet identified the good and the bad. He drew distinctions between various behaviors and attitudes and people, and spoke unblinkingly of consequences. He told of God's love and compassion, and of God's holiness and hatred of sin. He spoke of salvation and of judgment. God has not left himself anywhere without a witness, for wherever people have left a written record, we find in different dress the same truths spoken merely with greater clarity by the Hebrew prophets.

At many times: Anyone who has spent much time reading and studying the Scriptures should be struck, not only by its diversity, but also and especially by its unity. Consider the fact that it was written over a period of 1500 years by about 40 different authors in a wide variety of political and cultural settings. Imagine a book begun by Julius Caesar and finished 1500 years later by Columbus, having 40 different authors, and yet the thematic unity of the Bible. It is incomprehensible. Yet we find in the scriptures, not only a thematic unity, but a growing clarity in the story of salvation, as the true character of the city of God and the city of man progressively unfolds.

In various ways: If the unity is impressive, the diversity adds to the pleasure one has in studying the Bible. Rather than an impossibly long and tedious epic poem, or a perplexing thousand pages of apocalyptic images, we have a rich potpourri of literary genre: prophecy, sermon, song, historical narrative.

4. God has spoken his final and best word through his Son (Hebrews 1).

Yet with all the riches of the Scripture, one may still be forgiven for standing back and asking, Is there not one out of all the teachers and interpreters of Scripture to whom I can go, who understands all this, whose word can always be trusted, one who has the words of eternal life, one who can show me the face of God?

God has spoken his final word: His speech culminates in one person. This is one of the reasons that Jesus came into the world. He is the great prophet promised by God to his people. As the voice of God said to the disciples on the Mt. of Transfiguration, "This is my Son... Listen to him!" (Mt.17:5), so here: If you would know truth, look at Jesus: "... but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.... He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature..." (Hebrews 1:1&2).

If you want to know who God is, what God is like, study Jesus. If you want to know what we were meant to be as creatures made in God's image, look at Jesus. If you want to know what we who have been redeemed shall one day become, look at Jesus.

5. God is speaking to you right now through all of these combined means.

God is speaking to you now. Do you hear him? Have you been listening to his voice this morning: through the music, the prayers and Scriptures, through the stirrings of your heart?

Conclusion

God is not silent. Humanity is deaf. Jesus came into the world to enable the deaf to hear, the blind to see, to awaken us to the reality of a universe that unceasingly proclaims the high praises of our great God and King.

Will you ask him to send his Spirit to awaken you today to his gracious presence in the world around you and in the stirring of your conscience, in the testimony of those he sent with a word for his people, and above all in his Son, who is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and who came into the world so that you and I might no longer be strangers to God, but his beloved children? Don't miss the greatest gift of all this Advent season.

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