

Matthew 3:13-17. Isaiah 42:1-7

A question to start with - when was the last time you heard from God? When was the last time that you know God spoke to you? If we think of the contrast and the amount of years between what we read in the Old Testament (dated 600-700 BC) and the time in which we quickly move to in Matthew's gospel this morning, I'm guessing the people have had relative silence in comparison to times gone by where God appeared to be speaking constantly to his people.

In the Old Testament when God spoke, things changed. These are the stories which we've all been brought up to know in our Sunday School years. These are the stories that get etched in our memories; these tales of when Heaven speaks to us:

The act of Creation itself, when God spoke, and the sun and moon were born, stars lit the sky, the earth formed, oceans divided from land, plants grew, and birds and animals covered the ground;

Noah heard God's call and built a big boat, rode out the flood with his family and animals of every description, and received God's promise in the form of a rainbow;

Moses, who had experienced repeated encounters with God: a burning bush that spoke, plagues and Passover, pillars of cloud and fire, time spent with God in a cloud on the mountain, with thunder and lightning crashing around him, coming down with his face so changed that he had to put on a veil so people could stand to look at him, and bearing tablets of stone with the foundation of the Law written on them;

And so the list goes on of Heaven literally touching earth.

Does God still speak today? Yes, I believe he does, as much as thousands of years ago. Epiphany is specifically a season in the church calendar where we think about God's revelation. God still speaks today.

So as we celebrate this period of Epiphany, what can we say about the manifestation, this illumination, this appearance of God here on earth. You see something completely different happened in the arrival of Jesus. God took on humanity to be one of us. We begin to get a glimpse of it in today's gospel story, the story of the baptism of Jesus. He came to be many things: the Messiah, the anointed one of God, the Saviour, the Lord...and yet Isaiah describes the coming of the Messiah as the coming of a servant...one who would suffer for and serve his people, one who would come to bring righteousness and justice, mercy and grace. This Servant, says God through Isaiah, will come not with trumpets and fanfare, not with torches and swords, but with a quiet voice and a gentle spirit, with constant care for his people. And he will come, says Isaiah, to be a light to the nations, to restore sight to the blind and to release those who are captives.

And these words would be fulfilled in Jesus. Blind Bartimaeus regained his sight and his place in society. Mary Magdalene found a sense of healing, acceptance, and belonging in Jesus' welcome.

Jesus comes to John the Baptist, not making a big fuss, but simply committing himself to God's service, in and through this act of baptism. And so the heavens open, showing pleasure to the Son who would commit the next 3

years to those things which Isaiah had prophesied. God now had a mouth on earth to speak through.

Today when heaven speaks we see Christian missionary agencies like CMSi reaching out to various parts of the world, when heaven speaks we see organizations' such as Release International working to support Christians whose voice is silenced. When heaven speaks we see lives which were caught up in the grips of alcohol, or gambling, or drugs, transformed through the love of a God shown through ordinary people.

When Heaven speaks, anything is possible. When Heaven speaks, everything takes notice, everything listens.

Do you think there was anyone around on the day of Jesus' baptism who didn't hear God speak those words, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased?" We know from the Gospels that despite the prophecies, despite the signs, despite this clear word from God, many people still misunderstood. They still missed the point. They still failed to grasp that there, in their presence, was God in the form of Jesus Christ.

Is it any wonder our world now is no different? It is filled with people, right outside our doors and extending to the other side of the world, with people who have not heard about God, who do not know about Jesus Christ, who do not understand that there is a Saviour who died and was resurrected for them. And many of those who have heard, like those Jews who did not recognize God in Jesus, simply don't get it...they don't understand the message...they have not heard Heaven speak in the words and deeds of Christian men and women who are trying to share the Good News. Why do people today still not hear or see God speaking? It's because those whom Jesus commissioned to make disciples i.e. you and me, are not speaking the word of God in our lives.

So where does Heaven speak today? Where can God be heard? – the answer must be in our words, in our actions, in our kindness to others, and in the way we live out the great love we have received. Heaven speaks when we pack up a shoebox to send to a child that we don't know, who will hear for the first time about Christmas, and the Christ who came for love, and peace, and justice for all people.

Heaven speaks when we offer people in our community help through acts of compassion. Heaven speaks when we this weekend come along to Alpha with a friend or relative to allow that voice from heaven to speak about a God who loves.

The challenge, for you and for me and for all of God's people is to speak clearly the words of Heaven: God is love, for you, and for me, and for all people. We may think we don't see the miraculous signs and wonders of God around us, and yet, think for a moment. Jesus came as a God incarnate - as a God here on earth - and told us that wherever we would go in His name, sent by him as his disciples, we would be given power and authority in his name. And so if we believe that and we demonstrate that, then people will see a God who acts, a God speaking to them through his servants here on earth.

In my office at home I have a lovely reminder of what God requires of me every day, and the words on this picture say this "let your **life** speak". So what is it today you would like people to see in and through you? I pray it is God at work, using you, so that others around you can hear and see God.