



Lent 5 (B)

The Voice

[RCL] Jeremiah 31:31-34; Psalm 51:1-13 or Psalm 119:9-16; Hebrews 5:5-10; John 12:20-33

God of order and unity, direct our thoughts and actions to sharing your unfailing love with all we encounter. In the name of your Son our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Lent, a season that calls us to repentance, in which we change our vestments to purple, a color associated with mourning. It is a somber season, and this may resonate with many of us today. It has been about a year since our worlds were completely changed. It has been a year of grieving, mourning routines – a year of adjusting to new ways of gathering. A year of limiting in-person gatherings to protect each other and the most vulnerable. A year of many changes, regardless of where you find yourself on this life journey.

And maybe this Lent, you decided to do some self-care or take on a specific spiritual practice. If you did, great! And if you did not, that's great too! With a pandemic raging and all of the unprecedented events, it is important to be kind to ourselves. It is important to be present with all these changes and feelings.

Current news and the social unrest of this past year have probably left us with the same request as the Greeks in today's gospel: "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." Now, we do not know much about the Greeks in this story; Andrew and Philip did not know what to do, but Jesus made sure to respond.

Of course, right before this passage, many people had witnessed Jesus calling Lazarus from the tomb, so they wanted to meet and listen to this man. Lazarus was drawing crowds, and this understandably caused a lot of concern among many, including the religious authorities.

Similarly, this pandemic has highlighted our desire to "see" or experience Jesus. We have come face-to-face with the ways in which our world continues to oppress, but it has also lifted new movements to create opportunities to correct what has been wrong for so long. Our Old Testament lesson reminds us that the Lord will forgive Israel. A radically new future is presented. Maybe this is a time of God forgiving our communal sins and making way for a radically new future. Forgiving us for not listening to the voice of the Father. For not listening to the voices of those suffering. For perhaps trying to ignore the realities or experiences of those whom we label as outsiders. Allowing this sin to separate us from God and others.

This pandemic has allowed us to see what privilege looks like and whom it benefits. And this has left us wondering what it looks like to serve the Father. Jesus says that those who serve must also follow. Today, we are serving the Father by loving our neighbors, by listening to those voices telling us that they are not doing well. We are following Jesus by protecting our neighbors.

In our gospel reading, Jesus heard the voice. Some thought it was thunder and others an angel, but they all heard something. And like the crowd, we may sometimes confuse the voice, or even deny it. But Jesus reminds us that this voice is for our benefit. That we must pay close attention to what God is doing and saying.

This year has been one of much listening. We have heard the voices of so many. We have heard the voices of our neighbors who are Black and indigenous people of color in ways that we have never heard before. We have heard the stories of families in need. We have heard the voices of anger, despair, and rage. We have heard the voices of the marginalized, the once forgotten.

What if we found God in these voices, too? Today, we can decide to be intentional about listening to these voices. We educate and inform ourselves in what matters to those who do not look or think like we do. We make space to welcome them into our lives, our communities, our churches, and our families. We welcome them in authentic ways that leave nothing to the imagination – because our actions make clear statements that we embrace all.

As we come to the end of this Lenten season, can you stop and wonder where you have heard that voice? From whom the voice came? Or even with whom have you shared this voice?

In answering and understanding these, you will also find *love*. You find God. You find forgiveness. You find that even in the midst of chaos, there is love. Even in our struggle, we will find love. You hear God saying that you are enough – that listening to God’s voice is transformative and healing.

Yes, it has felt like an extremely long season of Lent, but Easter is coming. We believe in a God who gives life. We believe that joy comes in the morning.

Perhaps you have been feeling like this unrest will never end. Although we are slowly coming to a new normal, we know that nothing will entirely go back to what it used to be – nor should it. Be reminded that the same Jesus who cried out with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” will do the same with us even when we don’t see it. Even now, God is calling us with a loud voice, saying, “Come out!”

Presiding Bishop Michael Curry reminds us in his latest book, *Love Is the Way*, “The journey is always a struggle. But the movement is always forward.” He adds, “Now, if you ask me why, I’ll answer I don’t know. But as Fredrick Douglass put it, ‘If there is no struggle there is no progress.’” We cannot learn from blocking changes or denying our struggles – and this is difficult to understand. There will be days when we will not get all of the work done, days when we will not know which voices to listen to – but God will

remain with us. We must take our time when listening to the voices around us and decide where we can find God in them. We must decide to love because we know that hate is too much to carry. We must continue to say, “We wish to see Jesus.” Let us continue to boldly claim this for our lives and for our world.

Be reminded that we are not alone. Remember that God delights in our particularities and that God sees our struggles. God recognizes all of who we are and all of what we experience. We have the example in Jesus, who also offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the One who was able to save. Jesus is the example for us to follow. So, offer up your prayers, your loud cries and tears, knowing that God hears them, knowing that we belong to a God whose compassion blots out our offenses. We serve and follow a God who sees our transgressions and loves us the same.

May the God who saw your tears yesterday and heard your silent prayers today provide and care for you in ways that cannot yet be described. May the voice sustain you, may love guide every part of your life, and may the loving and liberating Son, our Savior Jesus Christ give you peace. Amen.

*This sermon was written by **the Rev. Luz Cabrera Montes**, curate at Trinity Episcopal Church in Houston, Texas.*