



23 PENTECOST
NOVEMBER 15/16, 2014

FIRST, MARSHALL
PASTOR SCOTT FULLER

ISAIAH 36:1-3, 13-20; 37:1-7; 2:1-4; MATTHEW 5:14
Whose Voice?

Dear friends in Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Please join me in prayer: *Prepare our hearts, Lord, to receive your Word. Silence in us any voice but your own that in hearing we may believe and in believing we may obey your will revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Amen.*

Today's bible story focuses on the voices that we **hear**, the voices that we **heed**, the voices that **help** us be either healthy, wholesome, and wholly committed to God, or threaten to haul us down that un-holy highway to hell.

King Hezekiah hears both voices clearly – and the question is, which will he listen to, which will he heed? Put yourself in his place for a moment. Your country is under attack. Most of your cities have fallen. The only remnant you have left – of an army, of a country, of a people – is hiding with you behind the walls of Jerusalem.

You look out over the enemy surrounding your city and you know that, though you'll be able to hold out for a **little** while, you also have **no hope** of rescue from anyone, anywhere. You stand alone in all the world before this overwhelming army.

The fact that God has rescued his people in the past, may...MAY offer you a glimmer of hope. You know the stories – how God saved:

- Joseph from the pit and prison;
- the Israelites from Pharaoh's army; and
- David from Goliath and the Philistine army.

But for all practical purposes, the possibility that such a **tiny glimmer** of **hope** might **ignite** into the light of another miraculous victory seems to have about the same chance as does a candle...in a stiff *Marshall* breeze.

The emissary, the representative, the mouth-piece of the King of Assyria speaks with a booming voice so that **all** the people in Jerusalem will

hear – and **know** – that *resistance is futile*... **THUS SAYS THE KING OF ASSYRIA**, he roars, and then proceeds to:

- lie to,
- entice, and
- threaten the people of God...

And it **works**... King Hezekiah hears that voice, heeds its message, and sees what kind of unholy hell is about to be unleashed on his city, his throne, his people. What's his response?

- He tears his clothes.
- He covers himself in burlap.
- He goes to the temple...to seek refuge, to seek help, to seek God.

The king then sends his trusted advisors to speak with the prophet Isaiah, asking him to pray that the Lord might intervene. Isaiah speaks, and it is a voice that opposes what the Assyrian had said earlier.

Where the oracle of the enemy boomed, *Thus says the KING...*, the **PROPHET** says, *Thus says the LORD...* And God's message begins with those well-known words, ***Do not be afraid***...

Easier said than done, right? When you're afraid, does it help to have someone say, "**Don't** be afraid"? It's like saying to someone who is sad, ***Cheer up!*** or to someone who is frustrated, ***Relax!***

On the **other** hand, when the one who speaks a word of hope has the power to make that condition a reality, that's a different animal altogether. At our Men's Bible Study, we've reading through a novel, entitled A Prayer For Owen Meany, by John Irving.

It's the story of a young boy who is very small in stature, with an unforgettable voice, and an unflinching certainty that God created him that way for a very specific reason. As he grows into a young man, he is beset by a recurring dream that God has a plan for him: the Lord intends

to use him to save a lot of children, but it's a sacrificial event that will cost him his life.

We're now in the second-to-last chapter of the book. And where it once was that Owen would be **frightened** by his death-infused dream, now he seems almost at **peace** with his sacrificial calling. In fact, he is so at ease with his accepted path, that he now becomes the one to encourage his friends. *Don't be afraid*, he tells them, *Don't be afraid*.

Do not be afraid, says Isaiah to the king. So again, put yourself in Hezekiah's place. *Which message would dominate? Which speaker would you heed? Which voice would work its way into your heart?*

Fear or faith? Cowardice or courage? Surrender or stand fast?

On Wednesday, for Confirmation classes, Tonya helped me come up with a game that gave the kids a challenging experience of listening to two opposite voices at the very same time. They got into teams of three:

- One student from each group was blindfolded – those kids were all sent out of the chapel and couldn't hear the instructions.
- The other two became either the ***voice of good*** or the ***voice of evil***.

The adult volunteers scattered a few **bibles** and **\$5 bills** throughout the pews and the choir loft. [A little aside here: I'm **not** saying that money is **evil** – the Apostle Paul actually says that *the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil* (1 Timothy 6:10)]. I just needed a couple of good symbols so we set before them **money** and **God's Word** – voices that we're all pretty familiar with.

The rules were that the two speakers:

- couldn't tell the blindfolded person what they were looking for;
- couldn't drag or push them;
- could only use their words to convince their classmates to listen to **them** as the **only** one who was speaking the truth, the **only** one who could lead them to happiness and hope.

It was a very interesting game – the students were very creative in how they worked to convince their charge that only **they** were speaking the truth. When it was over, each person talked about their experience and how they felt as the game unfolded. As a general rule, most of the “evil” voices tried to praise the **worldly power** that they could give the person who listened to them. On the other side, those who were trying to lead kids to the **Bible** were fairly represented by Brooklyn Sukalski, who simply told her companion: *God wants you to do this.*

So it was with King Hezekiah. Every worldly instinct told him that the situation was **hopeless**, that the voice of the **enemy** king was speaking the **truth**, that the **army** encamped around them, that visual display of **awesome** power, was **proof** that there was only one voice worth listening to. Yet in **spite** of all that, *against all odds*, **regardless** of the **evidence** that filled his eyes and ears, Hezekiah listened to the voice of God... and God delivered them from the Assyrians.

Says v. 36 of chapter 37: *the Lord set out and struck down 185,000 Assyrian soldiers.* Even the Assyrian records show that though they had Jerusalem surrounded, for some reason the army returned home instead of besieging the city.

So here’s the question I want you to think about this week. ***What are the voices that you listen to? Are they looking to scare you or save you? Harass you or heal you? Tempt you or bless you?***

With all the voices that fill our ears throughout the course of a week, make sure that you take time to listen to the voice of God. I’m pretty certain that he will start out by saying, ***Do not be afraid***, even as he invites you draw strength from his Spirit, and new life from his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

I want to leave you with his wonderful quote from Joshua about courage and God’s presence in our lives.

***Be strong and courageous;
do not be frightened or dismayed,
for the Lord your God
is with you wherever you go
(Joshua 1:9).***

Amen.