

“DO YOU HEAR WHAT I HEAR?”

JOHN I: I-5

Deut. 8:1-5; John 1:1-5; Hebrews 1:1-4; 4:15-16

Every body has a story to tell! Our richest relationships center around the truly open ones that keep us sharing our lives openly, full of tales we can tell and the saga's of life we can share. I am so tempted to tell you some of the phenomenal stories I have heard, even this week! But alas, I will content myself to start our relationship, pastor to people, by letting you know a bit about me.

And my tale is told in testimony form, because I I have found that **God does speak to us**, sometimes directly, other times through other medium of His choice, but always for the purpose of guiding our lives to trust and fulfillment for His Glory. It is much like the amazing story we celebrate at the January season called Epiphany. The oriental Wisemen who followed the star of Bethlehem found that GOD SPEAKS, even to those who stand outside of the circle of His own people, and they confirmed what any of us can when we tell our Testimonies in the presence of our Christian brothers and sisters: God alerts people to His Will for them.

The Bible is full of a celebration of God's messages, God's word that started life from chaos, that ordered the steps of those who would be faithful to Him, and that eventually and miraculously finally came in flesh to redeem us, to reach as deeply as possible into our very own lives and restore life to us. So I ask you this morning, are you in a personal relationship with the Living God that engages you in conversation with His LIVING WORD? And then this question is next, **“Do you hear what I hear?”**

Shouldn't we be able to hear the God who speaks? And shouldn't we be celebrating the treasured words of life, the words that give us life, whether we are surprised by it, or comfortable with what we are hearing? And can't we help each other avoid the institutionalizing and deadening of a living word that has for generations brought hope to the hopeless, help to the helpless, and joy to the joyless, and best of all for our needs today, **direction to God's church?!**

The American poet, Emily Dickinson, said, “The soul should always stand ajar, ready to welcome the ecstatic experience.” And I believe God meant for Christians to stand ready to hear and to sort through, to discern, then to celebrate those words given, The Word of life, The Word of God, and as we so often do, but not nearly enough, Our Holy Scriptures!

I have a friend, a builder in our area, Ronnie Wheeler, a massive man, a hunter, a former Marine pilot in Vietnam. He cruises our neighborhood overseeing his new construction of homes and commercial areas. As I walk or jog in the same area, I love to see his big Ford F-150 slowly creeping around, and I know what is coming. I hail him down and ask him, “What did you hear last Sunday that you can remember and pass along?”

“Oh, it was a great lesson,” he will say. “Did you ever read Habakkuk? “...Or, “Do you remember the story of the Tower of Babel?!” And then we’re off for a good half-an-hour! He loves the written word because he has been so blessed and renewed by the Living Word, Jesus His Savior! And he loves to talk about and share what he hears in that **WORD** as he perceives God speaking to him.

The Wisemen perceived the message of a foreign God, and they believed it was a leading from heaven, God providing a heavenly sign to guide men from their false theories to the embodiment of His eternal truth. And God did lead these men to see with their own eyes the wonder of the birth of the King for the world in the land of Judah.

What we can cherish and what keeps us alert and alive with hope is this truth, *that God never leaves His world without evidence of His truth*, and those who are alert to the need for truth, the need for God’s guidance in word, or nature, or people, or in history, will surely find it!

That is my story. I was raised in a Christian home, the home of a pastor. My Dad and Mother, from Middle Tennessee and Northern Virginia, respectively, both attended Southern Seminary, which I said I would never do.. Dad left for WW2 and Jenny was born while Mom was in the Miami area waiting for Dad to come home on the ship from the Phillipines. I came

along while Dad served back at his home town at FBC of Murfreesboro, Tenn. We lived on the U Tenn. campus while I had birthdays 3, 4 &5, surrounded by UT students, since we lived in the BSU building there. I went through Elem. School in Marietta, Ga., while Dad served The FBC there. We later moved to Jacksonville, Fla. While dad served at the Avondale Baptist Church. These were my home churches where I regularly studied, learned and heard **God's WORD** preached.

I had heard a WORD spoken to me as a child about a step to profess my faith in Jesus Christ on Easter Sunday at the early age of 9. I was baptized soon after and always felt that I should know more than I did, but my response was absolutely necessary to what I felt God was calling me to do right then at that very time in my life! He was SPEAKING TO ME!

I went to Furman Univ., stayed and worked there one year following until my ROTC commission came through. I trained to be a tank commander, training for a 2 year hitch in Vietnam, which was never meant to be. I was sidelined into the very troubled Stockade at Ft. Jackson, SC , as I first arrived, because of my schooling in Sociology. It was hoped, so we were told, that a team of us "college boys with training in crazy people" could save General Hollingsworth's 2nd star and settle things down in an overcrowded jail full of young boys who had gone AWOL to avoid the war. While there, I delivered 3 men to Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas, to serve life sentences for murder. I was learning about a side of life that I didn't know existed, let alone had any thought of ever being a part of such.

Somehow I sensed that God was preparing me every step of the way for a life that He had planned. In fact, that was consistent with what my church had always taught me to believe, that nothing was simply randomly blowing in the breezes of life. That if you committed your way unto the Lord, He would direct your paths. *"Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him..."* That was a well known WORD to me, that and this, *"Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these things will be added*

unto you.” It was a faithful WORD to me through all my simple and happy childhood. I didn’t want it any other way.

I had sensed a WORD of call and claim on my life and committed my life into the ministry as a High School Senior, though I had little grasp of what or where that would lead me. Though I had been sure at the time, nothing seemed sure anymore but death and taxes. An unexpected time of confusion came as I left the military service after my 2 years. The world I had anticipated after a much protected time of school years was no longer the world I believed was out there. I had seen war, greed, crime, and probably most disillusioning was the pure and simple irrelevance of the church to all I had experienced. I did not want to be cloistered away into a world of fantasy around a religious life that had no WORD for these times and these people in my world.

I entered the Seminary 6 months later with fear and trembling, sensing that this was God’s WORD calling me, though I didn’t like it one little bit! There my worst fears were confirmed, I fell in love with this study of the scriptures, the written WORD of God through the ages. My eyes were opened in new ways and my heart transformed to be a lifelong listener, standing ajar, as the poet said, expecting more every day.

As I entered the pastorate, I felt certain it was in response to the direct WORD, the call of God, and I have sensed that in every church to which I have been called, including this one! Which brings me to ask the previous question, “Do you hear what I hear??” Because if you do, we are being called together for a Holy purpose, something larger than you and me, something God sized, as Henry Blackaby would say. No this is no more or less significant or purposeful than the very words and calling you and I have heard and followed in our individual lives. But this is God’s family, God’s house, God’s work, God’s plan for caring for the cries of people He has heard rising up from this community and all over this world.

God is about to do a new thing! I believe it and I want you to as well. I want you to surely see me as god’s servant among you, but also at this time as an

enabler, one who comes in the name of the Lord to help this congregation make the most of a very special time in your lives, and to be as open as possible to God's new calling, and to be as wise, as discerning, as hopeful, as full of anticipation, and as full of God's gifts and His spirit as He provides. If we do our work well together, responding to God's calling, God speaking to us, we will make an eternal difference, and God will be glorified, and you will be a little closer to heaven, a little stronger in spirit, a little better person, a lot more blessed in this lifetime!

DO YOU HEAR WHAT I HEAR?

I hope so, and I hope you never tire of hearing those sandaled feet beside you all the days that God gives us together!

AMEN!