***How Do I Know?***

Scripture: Acts 8:26-40

May 3, 2015

**Midweek Questions**

* How do you know when God is speaking to you?
* When you feel that God is speaking to you, what do you do?

**SERMON POINTS/OUTLINE**

* Although it may appear that biblical characters were easily able to discern when God was speaking to them, it might not be that simple for us.
* Sometimes, I have not understood clearly that God was speaking.
* In my experience, I am best able to discern God’s voice when it is confirmed in conversation with other disciples.
* The Philip in this story is not the disciple/apostle but one of the 7 deacons appointed by the apostles in Acts 5.
* The story of the conversion of the Ethiopian official takes place on a wilderness road.

**A Guide for Daily Reading and Meditation**

**A Prayer for Every Day:**

**Open our senses to Your direction, amazing God, so we may be alert to opportunities You give us. Fill us with good news to share with those who seek meaning for their lives. We are here because we need the good news ourselves. There is much in life that we do not understand. We seek to know Your Word and to be led by it. Recall us to the vows of our baptism, reconfirming in us the covenant promises that link us to You and to one another. As we meet You here, our hearts are lifted up in praise. May our worship glorify Your name and be pleasing to You. Amen.**

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**MONDAY**

Read Acts 8:26-40 (*NRSV*)[[1]](#footnote-1)

*26* Then an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Get up and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is a wilderness road.) *27* So he got up and went. Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to Jerusalem to worship *28* and was returning home; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah. *29* Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over to this chariot and join it." *30* So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" *31* He replied, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him. *32* Now the passage of the scripture that he was reading was this: "Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter, and like a lamb silent before its shearer, so he does not open his mouth. *33* In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth." *34* The eunuch asked Philip, "About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?" *35* Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus. *36* As they were going along the road, they came to some water; and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?" *37* *38* He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. *39* When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. *40* But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he was passing through the region, he proclaimed the good news to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

Take a few minutes today to write this story as the series of events – a numbered list or “itinerary.” Then, draw a cartoon for each of the events of the story. Be sure to include at least one concluding frame for the “what comes next” for the Ethiopian from your imagination. (There is no biblical evidence of what comes next for him, although the church father Iraeneus wrote that he was a missionary to his country.)

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**TUESDAY**

Dawn Chesser wrote, in the Preaching Notes for this week’s scripture:

The Holy Spirit, it seems to me, is between people. The Spirit does not confine its talk to one person alone. This means if we get a feeling about something, we probably shouldn’t act on it solo, as if it were a private communication between us and God. Instead, we should try to talk to someone else about it, someone who can help us confirm if it is, in fact, the Spirit talking. If we can find someone we trust, someone with whom we can connect, and talk over our feelings with that person, and have that person question us closely, peaceably, seriously, and with love, it is much more likely that the Spirit is talking than if we run around supposing that we have had a private and personal direct communication from God.

In other words, folks are right to be a little suspicious. The main weakness of Methodists is not that we question these things. Our problem is that when we get these feelings, we tend to keep them to ourselves. We tend not to act on our feelings.

Certainly, we need to be careful and to check out our feelings by practicing accountable discipleship and seeking further clarification if they are indeed of God. But if we do believe we have heard a word from the Holy Spirit, we need to be acting on those feelings! We should try not to be pushy or overly aggressive with our testimony. But if the Holy Spirit is talking among us, we must find ways to share the good news with others! This confused and troubled world needs all the good news it can get. It needs the right kind of direction. It needs direction from the angel of the Lord. It needs the guidance of the Holy Spirit.[[2]](#footnote-2)

* How does Rev. Chesser’s description of the way the Holy Spirit words resonate with you? Consider times when your perception of God’s voice/God’s speaking to you has been affirmed or confirmed by a conversation, perhaps unexpected? In keeping with her suggestion that God speaks to us more in feelings that in actual words, how did you feel when God spoke and then again when God’s direction was confirmed or affirmed?
* In the third paragraph, Rev. Chesser mentions “accountable discipleship.” This term is rich in meaning but essentially means participating in some kind of spiritual growth with others, usually some kind of small group where everyone shares. John Wesley’s instructions to the early Methodists was to “watch over one another in love” in class meetings. For me, it is often in a small group where the insights of others in the group help my own articulation and practice of faith. Where are you practicing accountable discipleship?

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**WEDNESDAY**

Re-read this week’s scripture lesson 2 times today:

1. As you read the first time, note words or phrases that jump out at you today. What is the significance of those words/phrases for you?
2. The second time you read, write down what you think God is saying to you today about your practice of your faith.
3. Talk about #2 with someone that you trust.

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**THURSDAY**

Look back over your life to a time when you heard God speak.

* Were you in a good place spiritually? Reflect on how you heard God’s voice and what you did about it in response. Write about that time in your journal.
* Were you in the wilderness? A dry time? Under pressure? Was God’s speaking to you a huge surprise because of where you were personally? Reflect on how you heard God’s voice and what you did about it in response. Write about that time in your journal, too.

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**FRIDAY**

Reflect on this hymn by John Haynes Holmes. This hymn has a very public focus – God calling us to make a difference to people in need. It also closes with a prayer that we will not be tempted by “ease and plenty.” Where is God calling you right now? Where is God calling you to work for justice, to make a significant difference in the world?

1. The voice of God is calling

its summons in our day;

Isaiah heard in Zion,

and we now hear God say:

"Whom shall I send to succor

my people in their need?

Whom shall I send to loosen

the bonds of shame and greed?

2. "I hear my people crying

in slum and mine and mill;

no field or mart is silent,

no city street is still.

I see my people falling

in darkness and despair.

Whom shall I send to shatter

the fetters which they bear?"

3. We heed, O Lord, your summons,

and answer: Here are we!

Send us upon your errand,

let us your servants be.

Our strength is dust and ashes,

our years a passing hour;

but you can use our weakness

to magnify your power.

4. From ease and plenty save us;

from pride of place absolve;

purge us of low desire;

lift us to high resolve;

take us, and make us holy;

teach us your will and way.

Speak, and behold! we answer;

command, and we obey!

~ Rev. Vivian McCarthy, Pastor

Reisterstown UMC

May 3, 2015

1. *New Revised Standard Version Bible*, copyright 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Dawn Chesser, Preaching Notes for Fifth Sunday of Easter found at http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship/lectionary-calendar/fifth-sunday-of-easter7 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)