

## SPG#218, Pentecost 18B, Proper 22

October 4, 2009

Job 1:1; 2:1-10

Hebrews 1:1-4; 2:5-12

Mark 10:2-16

Today's epistle is drawn from the book of Hebrews. Traditionally the identity of the author of Hebrews has been uncertain. Some ancient sources attribute the book to the Apostle Paul, some Clement of Rome, some Luke, and some Barnabas. There are some theories that it was written by a group of writers. But mostly we just do not know. Hebrews has been called an orphan in the New Testament, since authorship has never been established by historical record or by tradition. There was some disagreement over whether it should be included in the canon of scripture. It was not until the fifth century that Hebrews was included, mostly through the influence of Augustine, Athanasius, and Pope Innocent I. In today's reading there are two broad subjects. First, there is the proclamation of God creating humans, how he made them, for a little while, lower than the angels, and crowned them with glory and honor, subjecting everything under their feet. And secondly, Jesus Christ, born as a human being, through his life, suffering, an death, became one of us. The tone of the passage is pastoral. The writer carefully lifts up humanity as the crown of God's creation. The writer is equally careful to underscore how obviously and clearly Jesus became one of us, was not ashamed to be one of us.

What really comes through to me in this Hebrews reading is how often God has spoken to us through prophets, visions, conversations, and other ways. What comes through is how important it is to God that we hear what is being said, and that we hear it clearly. And I thought about my own life and how important it is for me to hear others and to be heard by them.

You know, it is a funny thing. I have designated myself as hearing impaired for over ten years now. And in those ten years I have become familiar with hearing assistive devices, reading lips, the pitches of voices that are easier for me to hear and ones that are harder for me to hear, and other nuances of the hearing impaired life. And I have learned that no two hearing impairments are the same. I have a problem hearing higher pitched voices in certain settings. But other people I know have a problem hearing lower pitched voices. In general, I have a problem with higher pitched women's voices and children's voices. I think I have a problem hearing children because I am not as easily able to read their lips because of difference in height. My office is designed so that the light falls on the face of the person with whom I am conversing. Certain physical settings are harder for me. Any setting that has surrounding voices and conversations going on simultaneously is more difficult.

Probably here at St. Paul's, the coffee hour is hardest for me. And in a coffee hour, along with the difficulty in hearing certain voices, there is the difficulty of not being able to filter out the rumble of other surrounding voices. Many people who are not hearing impaired assume that they just need to speak louder. But, even though that can be helpful, for me it is not quite that simple. For, even with devices, I have not been able to regain the hearing of certain sounds. Mostly I cannot make out consonants which appear at the beginning and end of many words. Letters like d, s, f, b, k, and others are particularly difficult, and more difficult if I cannot see the moving of your mouth. And so it is a loss of clarity as much or more as it is a loss of volume. I am acutely aware of how much I inconvenience people by not hearing what they say. And I wonder if they are as eager to have me hear what they say as I am eager to hear.

Sometimes I get mad at myself for not knowing whether you are talking about the love of God or frost on your windshield. Sometimes I see people talking with each other as they turn their heads and look at other things as they speak and are perfectly heard by the other. And I wonder, 'how did they do that?'

On any given day, and particularly in a crowded room, if I did not hear what you said, and if it seems to me that repeating might help, I might say, "Say that again," or "Huh?" But if it seems that no amount of repeating would help, I might nod my head even if I did not hear what you said. Then I feel guilty, because I have lied.

Ideally, and in general, in any given conversation, I am at my hearing best if there is no head turning, and I have a clear line of sight to your mouth as you enunciate the words.

Perhaps a good spiritual space to have with a hearing impaired person is a space where both communicate without speaking.

I think it is true that some hearing impaired people tend to withdraw into themselves because of the frustration, the embarrassment, and the anger of being hearing impaired.

For myself it probably is partially true that I withdraw into myself more. But in many ways I hear better now with my heart than I do with my physical ears. I am much more tuned into what seems to be indicated by what a person says and not just what is said. I do grieve the loss of some physical hearing. But I celebrate that I hear better in other ways.

All of these words on being hearing impaired came as a result of my reading the epistle for today from Hebrews. And I realized again how focused God is in speaking to us and how important it is to God that we hear with clarity. Let me read for you again most of today's reading: **Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. The writer asks the question of God, 'What are human beings that you are mindful of them, or mortals that you care for them? You have made them for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned them with glory and honor, subjecting all things under their feet.'**

Then, to answer the question that he just asked about the importance of humans, he continues, **Now in subjecting all things to them(humans) God left nothing outside their control. As it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to them, but we do see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God, he might taste death for everyone. It was fitting that God, for whom and through whom all things exist, in Bringing many children to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one Father. For this reason Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters, saying, "I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters, in the midst of the congregation I will praise you.**

In these words I hear four things: (1) I hear to what great lengths God has gone, and to what great lengths God goes, just to be heard by us. (2) In those great lengths, I hear that the coming of Jesus was the utmost of God in all the great lengths to be heard by us. (3) I hear how highly esteemed human beings are in God's eyes. (4) I hear how God not only holds us in high esteem, but loves us.

I am able to hear these words in my heart. I do not have to strain at reading lips. I do not have to be concerned about surroundings. My gratitude and love at hearing these words far outweighs my frustration at being physically hearing impaired.

I know that God loves me, to the point of calling me a brother or a friend. And I know that God wants us to love back in the same way. And I know that God would have us love each other in the same way. And so, in loving God and each other, we should always strive for clarity. We should strive to hear and to be heard by all. And we should clear away in our lives whatever impedes that loving.

Then we can say when we hear God speaking in the many and various ways in our lives, we can say "Speak Lord, for your servant hears." Amen.