Come to Your Senses During Lent – Noticing the Presence of God.

Hear God

1 Kings 19:9-13 March 16, 2025

John 10:1-18; John 10: 27 Kimby Young

Romans 10:14-17

This season of Lent, I am using our five senses as a way to approach God. We are thinking about how our senses can help us to notice God’s presence and power among us. How can we come to know God with us - through sight, sound, touch, smell and taste? I started last week with sight. This week is hearing, listening, sound and voice. When thinking about worship – sight and hearing are probably the most important for Presbyterians. We are not a very active denomination. Most of what we do in worship is spoken or sung. For many of us, music is absolutely essential to worshipping God. Even when I’m not in the sanctuary, a song will speak to me most clearly. I often sing my prayers and praises to God. Hearing is essential for us. Hearing can help us to understand God.

The question becomes, how do we hear the voice of God amid all the other noises around us. Not surprisingly the scripture is full of references to hearing, and calls to hear the voice of God. Listen. Pay attention. Turn your ears and your hearts to God. The reading from 1 Kings demonstrates that sometimes the voice of God is obvious, like thunder from heaven or powerful wind. But sometimes God’s voice comes in unexpected ways. The translation of verse 12 is that Elijah hears God in a still small voice. It could also be a gentle whisper, a deep silence, a thin quiet, a gentle blowing. We expect a deep booming voice of clarity. But sometimes we hear a nudge, a quiet confidence, a knowing calm. Sometimes God speaks to our hearts. Sometimes we hear and understand. Sometimes we are uncertain. Always God speaks. God reaches out to us and wants us to understand. God wants us to hear. God loves us.

In the reading from John, Jesus says, “My sheep hear my voice.” Jesus says we can recognize Jesus. We can understand God’s will if we focus and listen. It may not come as fast as we wish but all who seek understanding will hear God’s voice.

How do we hear the voice of Jesus and distinguish from all others? How does the sheep hear the shepherds voice and know to follow? It doesn’t happen on the first day. It happens because the shepherd is carefully and consistently there. It happens because the sheep feel safe, protected, well fed and loved. It happens because the sheep trust the shepherd. Like the sheep, we are safe, protected, nourished and loved. We trust the guidance we are given over time. We lean into the love we have received. We know that God cares. We know that God loves us. We trust God. Over time, we recognize the voice of the shepherd more clearly than all others. We recognize the voice of God and we follow Jesus. It may not happen immediately. It happens with patience and practice, focus and faith. Listen for the voice of God.

The reading from Romans is a little different from the others. It is more instructional. Beyond listen to the voice of God – it suggests how to listen and how to hear God. The last verse says, “faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ.” It suggests that if we read scripture and study God’s word – we will hear more clearly. Again, it may not be immediate. WE may not understand God the first time we open the Bible. But Paul suggests in this letter that if we continue to dig into the word of God, if we keep listening, we will hear God. We will understand the message of Jesus. We will receive the good news.

And beyond that, it is up to each of us to help others hear that good news, to hear the voice of God. Paul argues, “how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim Jesus? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent?” In other words – how is anyone going to hear God and know the good news if we don’t help tell them? We are sent to speak the truth and to share the good news of God’s love in Jesus Christ our Savior. If we don’t speak, others will not hear. If others don’t hear, how will they be saved? How will they know God loves them unless we share, unless we point toward Jesus and help them to hear God’s voice? It is our calling to share God’s love. God is calling us to share the love of Jesus. Listen and respond.

Here we are this second week of Lent, this first weekend of Spring Break, this year 2025. There are a lot of voices and noises calling out to us for our attention. Amid all these distractions, how shall we hear God’s voice? How will we help others to hear and receive the love of Jesus?

Last week I suggested that you might use your sense of sight to look for God, to notice God’s gifts around you, and to capture glimpses of grace. This next week, I invite you to listen, especially to listen for the word of God. That might be that you concentrate on sounds, noises, music, words and voices. It might also mean that you listen within to that still small voice, that profound silence in the presence of God, that gentle blowing of the breath or Spirit of God. This might be a harder assignment – narrowing down the many voices around us to hear clearly the voice of our Shepherd calling. Calling you by name. Knowing you completely. God loves you. Jesus calls you. Listen.

I’m going to try something now, because I know this has been a rather abstract sermon today. So I am trusting the Spirit of God to move among us. As you came in, there were small cards with a single word or two on them. You were asked to grab one randomly to receive God’s message for you. I want you to look at that word now. There are 150 different words. I believe God directed you to get the one you should have today. Maybe because it speaks to you or will speak to you. Maybe because it affirms you or blesses you. Maybe because it reminds you of something you already know. Maybe because it challenges you to something new, or some way to grow in God’s grace. Your challenge is to think about your word for the week ahead. Or longer if you wish. Think about it every day. Ask God to speak to you through this word shared. Ask God to speak to you.

A word is just a random bunch of letters or sounds. But it is also a thought or an idea captured in order to communicate, in order to connect. There is a reason we call Jesus the Word of God in flesh. There is a reason scripture is called the Word of God written. A Word can be very powerful. And the Word of God – the idea or thought or essence of God – captured in a way that we can understand. That is Jesus. The Word of God made real so that God can communicate with us. The Word of God given – that God may speak to each of us. That is miraculous. May you receive such a word from God this day and this season. May you share that Word of God’s grace for the rest of your life. Let us give thanks to God.

March 16, 2025 – Lent 2 – Hear

1 Kings 19:9-13

At that place he came to a cave and spent the night there.

Then the word of the Lord came to him, saying, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” He answered, “I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts, for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away.” He said, “Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.” Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind, and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake, and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire, and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then there came a voice to him that said, “What are you doing here, Elijah?”

John 10:1-18

“Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.” Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

So again Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and bandits, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved and will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own, and my own know me, just as the Father knows me, and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father.”

John 10: 27

My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me.

Romans 10:14-17

But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!” But not all have obeyed the good news, for Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed our message?” So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ.

The Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.