

27th August 2023 – Morning Service

“Can you hear me?” asks God

Adapted from a service from Christine Odell

Call to Worship - Psalm 95

Come, let us praise the Lord! Let us sing for joy to God, who protects us!
Let us come before him with thanksgiving and sing joyful songs of praise.

StF 418 – We have a gospel to proclaim

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1) We have a gospel to proclaim,
Good news for all throughout the earth;
The gospel of a Saviour's name:
We sing his glory, tell his worth. | 4) Tell of that glorious Easter morn:
Empty the tomb, for he was free.
He broke the power of death and hell
That we might share his victory. |
| 2) Tell of his birth at Bethlehem -
Not in a royal house or hall,
But in a stable dark and dim,
The Word made flesh, a light for all. | 5) Tell of his reign at God's right hand,
By all creation glorified.
He sends his Spirit on his church
To live for him, the Lamb who died. |
| 3) Tell of his death at Calvary:
Hated by those he came to save,
In lonely suffering on the cross,
For all he loved his life he gave. | 6) Now we rejoice to name him King:
Jesus is Lord of all the earth.
This gospel-message we proclaim:
We sing his glory, tell his worth. |

Edward Joseph Burns © Canon Edward J Burns CCL No. 515642

Prayer of Adoration

Creator God, you spoke and our world came into being. At its birth the morning stars sang together in joy. You breathed life into man and woman, you breathe life into us. And, when we refused to listen to your words to us, You sent your prophets and messengers, to remind us of your message of love and justice. With our lips and our lives: **we sing your praises.**

Word of God, you came to live alongside us, to share the trials and joys of human life and speak to us in a language we could understand...of the Love at the heart of the universe. You came to show us, by word and deed, Love's compassion and forgiveness, to heal our deafness to God and one another. With our lips and our lives: **we sing your praises.**

Spirit of God, you rested as fiery tongues of flame on the heads of the first apostles enabling them to tell the Good News of Jesus in language all could understand. You continue to speak through your church, through us. You continue to breathe words of hope and encouragement, of Love, joy and forgiveness, to all who will listen.

With our lips and our lives: **we sing your praises.**
In the blessed Name of Jesus, **Amen.**

Introduction to the theme

The theme for our service is "Can you hear me?" asks God". Statistics tell us that one in ten of those aged 40 - 69 has age related hearing loss. Impaired hearing is a life-altering problem for many of us. It is the 'unseen disability' that others find it hard to understand. In our service we will be thinking about hearing and listening. God challenges each one of us with the question 'Can you hear me?' The kind of hearing and listening God requires of us is not dependent on our physical ability to hear, but on the opening of our hearts and minds to God's message of love for all. Let's hear a brilliant OT story all about 'can you hear me' as God calls Samuel...

Reading: 1 Samuel 3:1-10

Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the Lord under Eli. The word of the Lord was rare in those days; visions were not widespread. At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the Lord, where the ark of God was. Then the Lord called, 'Samuel! Samuel!' and he said, 'Here I am!' and ran to Eli, and said, 'Here I am, for you called me.' But he said, 'I did not call; lie down again.' So he went and lay down. The Lord called again, 'Samuel!' Samuel got up and went to Eli, and said, 'Here I am, for you called me.' But he said, 'I did not call, my son; lie down again.' Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, and the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him. The Lord called Samuel again, a third time. And he got up and went to Eli, and said, 'Here I am, for you called me.' Then Eli perceived that the Lord was calling the boy. Therefore Eli said to Samuel, 'Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening."' So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

Now the Lord came and stood there, calling as before, 'Samuel! Samuel!' And Samuel said, 'Speak, for your servant is listening.'

Reflection and prayer

This account of the infant Samuel is often told in Sunday schools as a story of how God speaks not only to adults but also to children. It makes the point that God has a message for each one of us - even if we don't immediately recognize his calling voice. God's Spirit flows freely through our world, and it is through our openness to God's voice in unexpected places and our dedication to prayer, that we can tune into God's message for us.

Loving God, we admit to you in sadness that so often the things you say to us take us by surprise, find us unprepared. We expect to hear you in church, blessing our offering of money, we do not expect to find you begging from us on the streets. We expect to hear you in the Bible readings or sermon, we do not expect to hear you speaking through our television screen in reports of hunger, warfare or persecution. We expect to hear you as we experience the emotion of prayer and praise, we do not expect to hear you in the dull complaints of everyday living. *[Silence....]*

Word of God, we confess that we do not always hear, or want to hear, all you have to say to us. Open our ears to your call, Lord. Tune us in to what you are saying to us. Forgive the deafness of our souls. In the name of Jesus, who brought us the message of forgiveness and healing, **Amen.**

StF 666 – Master, speak! Thy servant heareth

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1) Master, speak! Thy servant heareth,
Waiting for thy gracious word,
Longing for thy voice that cheereth;
Master, let it now be heard.
I am listening, Lord, for thee;
What hast thou to say to me? | 3) Master, speak! Though least and lowest,
Let me not unheard depart;
Master, speak! For O thou knowest
All the yearning of my heart,
Knowest all its truest need;
Speak, and make me blest indeed. |
| 2) Speak to me by name, O Master,
Let me know it is to me;
Speak, that I may follow faster,
With a step more firm and free,
Where the Shepherd leads the flock
In the shadow of the rock. | 4) Master, speak: and make me ready,
When thy voice is truly heard,
With obedience glad and steady
Still to follow every word.
I am listening, Lord, for thee;
Master, speak! O speak to me! |

Frances Ridley Havergal

Reflection

'Can you hear me through the words of Jesus?' asks God. Our next two readings, from the gospels, are about hearing and listening to his message, and Jesus opening the ears of the deaf. In the first reading, the disciples wonder why, although the people hear Jesus's stories, they do not take in his teaching or recognize him. Jesus points out that there is a difference between hearing and listening. When we truly listen, what we hear can become part of our understanding of life. In the second reading, Jesus performs a miracle, which shows what living life in all its fullness in the kingdom of God will be like. A man cut off from society, unable to communicate with others, is healed of his deafness and enabled to speak.

Reading: Matthew 13:10, 13-16

Then the disciples came and asked him, 'Why do you speak to them in parables?'

The reason I speak to them in parables is that "seeing they do not perceive, and hearing they do not listen, nor do they understand." With them indeed is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah that says:

"You will indeed listen, but never understand, and you will indeed look, but never perceive.

For this people's heart has grown dull, and their ears are hard of hearing, and they have shut their eyes; so that they might not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and understand with their heart and turn—and I would heal them."

But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear.

Reading: Mark 7: 31 -37

Then he returned from the region of Tyre, and went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. They brought to him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they begged him to lay his hand on him. He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue. Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, 'Ephphatha', that is, 'Be opened.' And immediately his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. Then Jesus ordered them to tell no one; but the more he ordered them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. They were astounded beyond measure, saying, 'He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak.'

Dramatic Telling

I felt really afraid. My friends looked very excited and were jabbering away like quarrelling sparrows but I, of course, had no idea what they were saying. As usual, it seemed, they were making a decision for me about something I had no idea about and certainly no say! They grabbed me by the arms and took me through the village to where a man with kind eyes was talking to a crowd of people - about what, I couldn't tell you.

They went to speak to him, Jesus, and he looked beyond them to where I stood, bewildered, and he smiled at me. He came over, took me gently by the hand and led me to where we could be alone, a place of quiet and calm. Then he did some strange things. He put his fingers in my ears, spat, and touched my tongue. He looked up to heaven, in a really intense way - and must have made some kind of sound. Then he said to me - and I heard it! - 'Open up!'. And my ears were opened, and my mouth was opened, and my whole life in this world was opened up before me.

It was all rather mysterious and difficult to understand. I knew for certain that God was working through Jesus, but I realise that others might have had different ideas. I think that's why he told the people there not to talk about what had happened. But did they listen? No! There's more than one way of being deaf!

There's more than one way of being deaf! 'Open up!' says Jesus to him and to us – how often do we not hear God because our hearts and minds are not open, or because of our selective hearing of God's message!

StF 264 – Make way

- 1) Make way, make way, for Christ the King
In splendour arrives.
Fling wide the gates and welcome Him
Into your lives.
- 2) He comes the broken hearts to heal
The prisoners to free.
The deaf shall hear, the lame shall dance,
The blind shall see.
- Ch) *Make way! (Make way!)*
Make way! (Make way!)
For the King of Kings (For the King of Kings)
Make way! (Make way!)
Make way! (Make way!)
And let His Kingdom in.
- 3) And those who mourn with heavy hearts,
Who weep and sigh;
With laughter, joy and royal crown
He'll beautify.
- 4) We call you now to worship Him,
As Lord of all.
To have no gods before Him
Their thrones must fall!

Graham Kendrick © 1986 Thankyou Music CCL No. 515642

Reading: Romans 10:10-17

For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. The scripture says, 'No one who believes in him will be put to shame.' For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. For, 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

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.

Reflection

'Can you hear me through the words of other people?' 'Can other people hear me through your words?' asks God. There are two skills that Christians need to learn and use, in order to answer 'Yes' to this question from God...

The first is the skill of being a good listener, of being able to be present and to focus in a spirit of love, understanding and respect on what others tell us. Then we will hear the voice of God in that conversation and not only our own voice.

I came across a wonderful new term, the other day, which I could immediately relate to. It's called phubbing. It means to 'snub' somebody by not properly listening to them when they are speaking, because you are looking at your phone at the same time! The moment I heard that term I realised that not only had I been 'phubbed' on many occasions, but that I myself had done it to other people frequently! It made me stop and think about how insincere my listening may sometimes appear to be...

The second is the skill of good talking - guided by that same spirit of love, understanding and respect. As Christians we have a message to share, but we don't want that message to be distorted or misunderstood. We can practice these skills on one another!

To think about

A day in the life of a hearing-impaired older adult may include struggles with the following: hearing alarms or telephones & understanding someone while talking on the phone; understanding when several people are talking; understanding when a speaker's face is unseen; understanding speech on TV; understanding whispering; understanding people in a large room; understanding unclear or accented speech; being unaware someone is talking; understanding in public places; ordering food; or enjoying "sweet nothings" in a romantic situation.

Individuals with normal hearing often assume that simply saying something louder or turning up the volume will enable a hard-of-hearing elder to hear. Volume is not necessarily the issue; difficulties with sound and word discrimination may be involved. The need to repeat or receiving strange responses to what is said adds to negative perceptions of older adults with hearing loss as being slow. The resultant negative self-view adds to the emotional pain of hearing loss.

A sense of belonging is important to mental health, yet individuals who are hard of hearing often feel they don't belong entirely in the hearing world or in the deaf culture.

Older adults who are hard of hearing often report that their hearing loss causes communication problems, and can result in difficulty thinking or concentrating. This results in inattentiveness, distraction, and boredom. The most serious consequence is withdrawal or failing to participate - "I can't participate, so I might as well pack it in. I can't contribute, so what good am I?"

Comment & Challenge

Hearing loss is a big problem for many in our society - and for many in our congregations. It will be difficult for those with hearing loss to answer the questions - 'Can you hear God through the words of other people?' 'Can other people hear God through your words?' Especially if they are no longer able to participate in conversations or hear much in worship or fellowship groups.

'Can you hear me through the words of other people?' 'Can other people hear me through your words?' asks God. In our journey of reflection today we perhaps see that God speaks often through the unexpected, and that we may or may not hear depending upon if we are open, in our hearts and minds to hear. We are reminded that true listening is an active process as we seek to restate and understand someone else's message. Perhaps we are also challenged to be more sensitive to the needs of those who are excluded, who are not heard or valued because they are different. What can we do, as individuals and as a church, to be better 'listeners and demonstrators' of the Kingdom of God?

Before our prayers of intercession, you are invited to spend some time in quiet reflection to think about this challenge.

[A time of quiet.....]

Prayers of Intercession

God of salvation, when we pray to you for the knowledge of forgiveness for those burdened by guilt and sin; when we pray to you for healing and comfort for those who are suffering or sorrowful; when we pray to you for help, patience and understanding for those with hearing loss - hear our prayers, and help us to listen to what we ask for, that our prayers might challenge and change us, too.

Lord, speak to us: **and help us to respond to your words.**

God of justice, when we pray to you for justice for the oppressed and exploited of our world; when we pray to you for food and shelter for the hungry and the homeless; when we pray to you for peace and security for war-torn communities - hear our prayers and help us to listen to what we ask for, that our prayers might challenge and change us, too.

Lord, speak to us: **and help us to respond to your words.**

God of love, when we pray to you for love and understanding between creeds, races and nations; when we pray to you for one another in our need for guidance and strength - hear our prayers, and help us to listen to what we ask for, that our prayers might challenge and change us, too.

Lord, speak to us: **and help us to respond to your words.**

In the name of Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, The Message of salvation for all humankind. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. **Amen.**

StF 663 – I the Lord of sea and sky

1) I, the Lord of sea and sky,
I have heard my people cry;
All who dwell in dark and sin
My hand will save.
I, who made the stars of night,
I will make their darkness bright.
Who will bear my light to them?
Whom shall I send?

*Ch) Here I am, Lord.
Is it I, Lord?
I have heard You calling in the night.
I will go, Lord,
If You lead me;
I will hold Your people in my heart.*

2) I, the Lord of snow and rain,
I have borne my people's pain;
I have wept for love of them
They turn away.
I will break their hearts of stone,
Give them hearts for love alone;
I will speak my word to them.
Whom shall I send?

3) I, the Lord of wind and flame,
I will tend the poor and lame,
I will set a feast for them
My hand will save.
Finest bread I will provide
Till their hearts are satisfied;
I will give my life to them.
Whom shall I send?

Daniel L Schutte © OCP Publications CCL No. 515642

Offering prayer

God of never-ending love, take this money and use it, take our lives and use us, for we have heard your call. **Amen.**

Blessing

We have heard of the love of God for each one of us. We have heard of the new life offered to us in the Word, Jesus Christ. We have heard the challenge to share that Good News with others. Now let us go out in joy to share God's message with those we meet. And may the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, go with us. **Amen.**