

St. Timothy's Lutheran Church
Pastor Jonna Bohigian

February 3, 2019
Exodus 18:13-27

Hearing God through Others

"Do you really believe that?"

"What do you mean?"

"Do you really believe that you are the only one God could use to speak through in this situation?"

"Well, no."

"You're sure acting like it."

I was *dumfounded*. He was exactly right. I had been acting as though *I alone* could, and was responsible, to speak truth into the situation. I had felt this oppressive weight that seemed to come with me everywhere I went. When I woke up, it was there. When I went to sleep, it was there. It consumed my thoughts. *I have to speak the truth! If I don't, who will?* When I didn't believe I was heard, I thought of new ways to communicate the same message I believed God had given me. This weight felt massive, and I believed that I was the one responsible to communicate the truth.

My friend was right. I *do* believe that God speaks through others and that I alone am not responsible to speak the truth. So I asked him what I should do.

"Pray that God will speak to others, and that they will speak up."

Are there ever times when *you* feel this way, that you *alone* are responsible to communicate the truth of God? It is so *easy* to forget that God speaks His truth through a variety of different methods and people. You are not the only one responsible.

In Exodus 18, Moses experienced a similar reminder. Moses had led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt, and took on the role of judge over all the Israelites. Verse 13 says, “Moses sat to judge the people, and the people stood around Moses from morning till evening.”

Moses’ father-in-law, Jethro, saw what Moses was doing, and he knew that this was not good. He asked, “What is this that you are doing for the people? Why do you sit *alone*, and all the people stand around you from morning till evening?” (Ex 18:14b).

Moses replied, “Because the people come to me to inquire of God; when they have a dispute, they come to me and I decide between one person and another, and I make them know the statutes of God and His laws” (Ex 18:15b – 16). In other words, Moses told Jethro, “God speaks to me, and so I must tell the people what I hear. The people come to me for help, and I help them.” But Moses *didn’t* answer Jethro’s question regarding why he did this *alone*. Perhaps Moses proudly thought that since he heard God’s voice, he *alone* was responsible to share God’s voice with the people. Perhaps Moses hadn’t even *thought* of getting help.

Jethro’s response to Moses was *fantastic*. “What you are doing is not good. You and the people with you will certainly wear yourselves out, for the thing is too heavy for you. You are not able to do it alone.” Jethro did not sugarcoat *anything* for his workaholic son-in-law. He said it like it was, and told him that he needed *help*.

In verse 18, Jethro said that Moses’ burden was “heavy.” This was the same word used to describe a famine, an army, the plagues in Egypt, Moses’ tongue, and Pharaoh’s heart. Jethro saw the burden Moses had taken on, and saw that it was

oppressive; it was a weight that Moses *would* crumble under. Moses could not judge the people night and day *every day*. It was simply too much. Moses needed help.

So Jethro told Moses what to do. Moses was to continue to listen to the voice of God, to present the people's cases to God, and to share God's word with the people. Moses was to select good leaders over thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens, who would judge the people over small matters and Moses would judge over the big matters. And so, Moses would share his burden with the people.

Moses had a burden to bear, but it should not have been oppressive. Moses *needed* to share his burden with other capable leaders. He listened to his father-in-law, and appointed other leaders to bear the burden with him.

For some of us, it is tempting to be like Moses pre-Jethro. We believe we are responsible to take care of everyone and everything, and we alone are responsible to speak the truth. If *we* don't speak the truth, who will?

There are a variety of problems with this belief. This can become an oppressive weight that we crumble under. We miss opportunities to involve other capable people in our lives, whom God desires to speak through. We also miss opportunities to humble ourselves and *listen*. It requires great *humility* to invite others to speak into our lives. In our pick-yourself-by-your-bootstraps society, it looks like weakness to ask for help. The truth is, no matter *how much* we think we can do on our own, we *are* weak. We *all* need help, from the youngest of us to the oldest of us. We need each other, and that is exactly how God intended it to be. It is a *good* thing that you can't do it all, and it is a *good* thing that I can't do it all.

Some of you struggle to let go. You have held a tight grip on your life, your family, and your circumstances, and you need others to come into your life to speak truth so that you can let go and share your burden. Know that it will be very difficult to hear God if you can't hear the people around you. God may very well be speaking to you through the very people you aren't hearing.

Perhaps you believe that God speaks to people, but you are unsure if *you* have heard God's voice. You have heard good advice or perhaps you have had a thought that you couldn't quite place. Fundamentally, the voice of God is always consistent with Scripture. God will not contradict Himself, so His message to you will be consistent with Scripture. When I have heard the voice of God, something deep within me resonated with that message. I recognized that the words I heard were wisdom. Sometimes the word I heard was a conviction of the Spirit, and something within me hurt. It was not the pain of rejection, but a pain of my sin.

Some of you struggle to believe that God speaks to you. I know your struggle. It takes great *faith* to believe that a God you can't see can speak to you. If this is your struggle, I want to invite you to pray and to ask God to show Himself to you. He *wants* to be known by you.

I'd like to guide us in a time of prayer. Please close your eyes. If you struggle to let go, pray that God would open your hands and speak through someone in your life. (Pause) If you struggle to know that God has spoken to you, pray that He would give you ears to hear Him. (Pause) If you struggle to believe that God speaks to you, pray for faith. (Pause) Lord You are good. Hear our prayer.

We *all* need encouragement along this journey of faith. I encourage you to seek out a Christian you admire and ask him or her how *they* hear God's voice. Perhaps they have a faith you would like to have one day. Consider speaking with them on a regular basis or perhaps ask them to be your mentor. There are many here at St. Tim's with a strong faith that you would be greatly encouraged by in an intentional relationship.

A little over a year ago, a woman named Teesie asked for help discerning God's voice. She thought that perhaps she ought to join the visitation ministry, because she wanted to encourage others who were homebound. She invited a friend to pray with her, and both discerned that the Spirit was saying "no" to visitation ministry. Teesie continued to pray, and heard God's voice pointing her in a new direction. She'd like to share that with you now.

→ Show video clip

Be encouraged, church, that God *is* in control. He *will* fulfill His promises, and God's Spirit *will* speak to you. He may bring someone like Jethro into your life, an unsolicited voice to speak truth. He may prompt you to *invite* someone to speak into your life, like a mentor or a prayer partner or a trusted Christian friend. He may be inviting you to listen to someone unexpected, such as someone considerably younger than you or with a different perspective than yours. And what a gift you will give to others, when you invite them to share in hearing the voice of God with you!

I am confident of this, that "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Phil 1:6). Amen.