

## Luke 5:17-26

One day, while [Jesus] was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting nearby (they had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem); and the power of the Lord was with him to heal. Just then some men came, carrying a paralyzed man on a bed. They were trying to bring him in and lay him before Jesus; but finding no way to bring him in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and let him down with his bed through the tiles into the middle of the crowd in front of Jesus. When he saw their faith, he said,

Friend, your sins are forgiven you.

Then the scribes and the Pharisees began to question,

Who is this who is speaking blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?

When Jesus perceived their questionings, he answered them,

Why do you raise such questions in your hearts? Which is easier, to say, "*Your sins are forgiven you*", or to say, "*Stand up and walk*"? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins

*...he said to the one who was paralyzed...*

I say to you, stand up and take your bed and go to your home.

Immediately [the man] stood up before them, took what he had been lying on, and went to his home, glorifying God. Amazement seized all of them, and they glorified God and were filled with awe, saying,

We have seen strange things today.

## Hebrews 1:1-2

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.

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This is the Word of the Lord: thanks be to God! Join me in prayer. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord our strength and our Redeemer. Amen

# The Mouth of God

(Move One)

In the previous times I have been in this pulpit (or this past January, when my sermon was here but I was not), we have looked at Psalm 115 and we have considered the Incarnation: the coming of God to earth as a man: Jesus of Nazareth, a *fully human* Human Being, complete with eyes and ears, hands and feet, a nose and a mouth.

We talked about how with his eyes Jesus saw things and people that we often miss or overlook. We talked about how with his ears Jesus listened to people that we often filter out or ignore.

So, not only was Jesus Christ living flesh and blood, (unlike the wood or stone idols of the other nations), he was *acutely sensitive* flesh and blood, with sharp hearing and 20/20 vision.

As we read the stories about Jesus' remarkable *hearing* and his extraordinary *sight* we learn more about *God* and about *ourselves*. Because, in Jesus of Nazareth God is revealing God's *self* to us not just supernaturally, but *personally*, person-to-person.

"To receive God's self-revelation is to know **not something** but **someone** we did not know before. The revealed truth Christians believe is not an *it* but a *Thou*." (Guthrie 54)

In Jesus Christ, God *communicates* to us; God *speaks* to us. That idea brings us to the focus of this particular sermon: the mouth of God, **The God Who Speaks**.

When I prepare this kind of sermon, I start with the theme from the scripture and ask myself questions. For Psalm 115, I've asked questions like the following.

What did Jesus see that we do not?

What did Jesus hear that we miss?  
What difference did it make that Jesus had a mouth that spoke?  
What did he say that needed to be said *by Him*?  
So, I picked up my Bible, and started skimming for an overview of  
**what did Jesus say?** [pick up bible and begin skimming through]  
Humph. You try it. I just went through *Luke*, and that was pretty  
overwhelming. When you think about it, it makes sense, because  
we consider the Bible to be the *Written Word*, even as Jesus is the  
*Living Word*.

Okay, so by Tuesday I had figured out that I was trying to preach  
on the *entire Bible and on Jesus* in **one** 20 minute sermon.  
(...Sigh...)

Clearly some kind of more narrow focus was in order. I went back  
to the Psalm. The idols had wooden mouths with painted-on lips  
that couldn't move. The gods of the nations were unable to  
communicate with their followers, while Yahweh *did* communicate  
with the Israelites. This idea is captured in the opening verses of the  
book of Hebrews, as I just read a few minutes ago:

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.

Aha! I revised my question:  
How did God speak to our ancestors, to the people of the Old  
Testament?

(*Move Two*)

Well, Yahweh spoke in two ways: through *God's people* and  
through *God's mighty acts*. From the creation of the world,  
through the release of the children of Israel from bondage in Egypt,  
to the return of the exiles from Babylon, Yahweh's mighty actions  
spoke volumes.

First of all, the act of creation was **literally** an act of speech: *Elohim said, and it was so*. God **spoke** the world into being.

In the history of Israel, *Yahweh was faithful, Yahweh provided*. In that history, because they could *see* and *feel* God's faithfulness and provision, Israel could *hear* God's love for them.

But God spoke through *people* as well as *actions*. How often in the Old Testament we read, *Thus saith the LORD*. I don't know what runs through your mind when you read those words, but I hear

**"NOAH"**  
**"Build an ark!"**

Now, while there are times when it seems that God did speak directly to people, more often than not God spoke indirectly, through a vision or a heavenly being. Isaiah had a vision of the Lord, *Sitting on a throne, high and lofty...* and Isaiah heard the voice of the Lord saying ***whom shall I send?***

In Genesis we find the story of Sarah's handmaiden Hagar, who has been sent out into the desert with her son to die. There, as the situation gets desperate, an *angel of the Lord* speaks to her, and tells her of God's promise for her son.

God used these *indirect* methods to speak to humanity in order to call, to **inspire**, to **direct**, to **reach out** to God's chosen people. But sometimes the **people** wanted to initiate the conversation. What they did then was consult a prophet. Now we need to understand just what we mean by *prophet*. A prophet is **not** a *fortuneteller*. A prophet is **not** someone who *predicts the future*. A prophet is a *spokesperson*, someone who *speaks on behalf of another*. In our case, a prophet is someone who *speaks on behalf of God*.

In the early days of Israel there were three accepted ways for a prophet to see what God had to say, to discern the divine will about a particular situation. Those three accepted ways were: *dream interpretation, the Sacred Stones, and prophesy.*

A good example of *dream interpretation* is told in the cycle of stories in Genesis about Joseph. God speaks to Joseph through dreams: first his own and later through the dreams of others. Joseph rises to power in Egypt due to his ability to interpret dreams, to speak as a prophet.

The *Sacred Stones* were used in a sacred rite in which the priest posed a yes-or-no question. The two stones were called the **Urim** and **Thummin** and they were actually part of the priest's vestments. The rite was a form of casting lots, very much like flipping a coin. The important concept here being that all involved recognized that *Yahweh determined the outcome of the priest's toss.* God spoke through the sacred stones.

In *prophesy* the true prophet spoke under the influence of Yahweh's spirit and was therefore able to proclaim the will of God in specific, concrete terms.

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Still, in all these methods of communication—dreams, visions, special stones, angels—God spoke to humanity *indirectly.*

[Pause]

Until the **incarnation**  
Until the **Word became flesh**  
Until Jesus spoke with a **human mouth**

*(Move Three)*

So, we're back to one of our first questions.  
What did the Creator of the Universe say with that human mouth?

How is the communication different now that it's Jesus speaking instead of *Yahweh*?

Well, I suppose the most striking difference is that it occurs at our level, in our context, directly. As Jesus, God is speaking to us human-to-human, if you will.

This new means of communication is neither the metaphoric imagery of dreams nor the limited yes/no of the stones. It is neither is the second-hand message of an intermediary nor the corporate pronouncement of the prophet. Instead, this communication is the **very intimate conversation between friends**. It is the **often-passionate exchange between adversaries**. It is the **compassionate words of a personal physician**. Jesus speaks *directly* and *personally* to ordinary men and women: he speaks to the *powerful* and the *powerless*, to the *in-crowd* and to the *outcasts*. Jesus speaks to their *hearts*, he speaks to their *minds*, he speaks to their *souls*.

But what does he *say* when he speaks?  
Let's turn to our Gospel passage.

The story starts out with Jesus teaching in a home. This is a standard setting for Jesus. We usually find him at the beginning of a story teaching and preaching, either in a synagogue, on a hillside in the country, in the home of a friend, or at the dinner table of an influential leader.

There are a couple of important points to consider about that. First of all, Jesus isn't a hermit, shut away from the world, waiting for faithful followers to make their way to him for words of wisdom. Rather, Jesus goes where the people are; he seeks them out. Even at the times when he tries to pull away, to withdraw from the demands of his ministry a bit and the people follow, he *accepts*

their presence and goes ahead and teaches them. Here again, just as in the Old Testament, God is *reaching out* to humanity.

Another important thing to notice is that Jesus is *teaching*, and he's doing so, the gospels say, with unprecedented authority. *Jesus the Word* is using human words to tell humanity more about God, themselves, and the relationship between the two.

Now, as he's teaching the villagers and the religious leaders who have gathered to hear him, a group of men bring in a friend of theirs who is paralyzed. They want Jesus to heal him. They make a rather dramatic entrance, cutting open a hole in the roof and lowering the man down on his bed. Jesus' reaction to their unexpected and undoubtedly disruptive entrance is simply to speak to them.

But what does he *say*? Does he say in an angry and superior voice,  
**"What do you think you're doing?  
Go get in line like everyone else?"**

No.

Does he raise his arms dramatically and proclaim loudly,  
**"I perceive that this man was paralyzed due to a severe spinal cord  
injury suffered during a fall, but I can heal him still!"**

No.

Does he narrow his eyes and shake his head while he offers words of judgment and condemnation,  
**"Your condition must have been brought on by some sin in your  
life: confess and be healed."**

No.

Does he say, clearly and directly,  
**"Stand up and walk."**

No.



Instead, he says,  
"Friend, your sins are forgiven."

Those words cause the religious leaders to recoil and to denounce his words as blasphemy. In response Jesus *tells* them and at the same time *shows* them that he does indeed have the **authority** and the **power** both to *heal* and to *forgive*. He **tells** them and **shows** them that he is **The Son of God**.

And the man who enters this story paralyzed, like the wooden idols in our psalm, unable even to utter a sound with his throat, exits the story *walking* and *glorifying God* with his no-longer-paralyzed mouth.

So, what does God do with a human mouth and lips?  
God uses the opportunity to speak *directly to us: to teach us, to forgive us, to heal us, to restore us to fellowship with others and with Godself.*

And now that the Living Word, Jesus, has returned to heaven, we have the Written Word—the Bible—that continues to speak to us, to teach us, to lead us to forgiveness and healing and restoration.

*(Move Four)*

Which takes us back to Psalm 115, where we realize that, while *Our God is back in heaven, doing whatever he pleases* it seems that, over and over, what pleases God is to reach out to humanity, to reveal Godself to us. Over and over our God speaks to us through history, through prophets and priests, through Jesus.

God still speaks to us today: God still speaks to us in *history*.  
God still speaks to us through the *Word*. God still speaks to us through the *community of God's people*.

I often joke about wanting a **Postcard from Heaven**: something *tangible*, addressed to *me*, with *specific* instructions or directions about *what* I'm to do with *whom*, *where*, *when*, and for *how long*. I'd imagine any Pastor Nominating Committee would appreciate a postcard with the name of the next called pastor written on it in bold letters.

But, while we may be frustrated with the indirectness of the methods, God *does* speak to us today, in sermons, in the sacraments, through Bible Studies and devotions, in our prayer time, through the lives of others, sometimes even through Sessions and committees!

I asked at the beginning of this sermon,  
What difference did it make that Jesus had a mouth that spoke?

Maybe the answer is this: *That's the way we are able to hear. Our human ears need to hear words coming from a human mouth.* That's the difference between the Almighty speaking in the OT and Jesus speaking in the NT. When Jesus spoke, it was one human being speaking to another. No more angels or disembodied voices, no more throwing stones or interpreting dreams. Just one human being speaking to another human being.

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That idea has profound implications for you and for me! We need to use **OUR** mouths to proclaim the Word of God. People need to hear the Good News of Jesus Christ coming from **OUR** human mouths! That's what Our Risen Lord said to his disciples:

Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation... So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. **And they went out and proclaimed the good news everywhere**, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that accompanied it. [Mark 16:15-20]

Go! Proclaim the good news everywhere! AMEN & AMEN