

She was a member of the congregation we seldom saw. It was not that she did not want to come to worship; in fact, she longed to be a part of the worshipping community. Her problem was that she waited for the “voice of the Lord” to tell her what to do. It told her what to wear or what not to wear. It told her what to eat or what not to eat. When she did come she may be dressed in one green shoe and one red one. There were days, her husband said, when she did not dress at all. Days when she did not eat all—because there was no “voice from the Lord” on those days. Extreme? Most definitely! However, I wonder if we even stop to listen?

I have little book of cartoons drawn by Charles Schultz. However, this is of the Peanuts characters as teen-agers. One of the cartoons I like has a teen-age boy lying on the floor with an open Bible. His father is standing nearby and the caption reads: “Don’t bother me now. I’m looking for a verse to back up one of my preconceived notions.” Sounds all too familiar: Whose voice do we want to hear?

Moses has just delivered the Law, the Ten Commandments. The people now have directions for living, directions on how to become a community. It is a day of celebration and awe. There are noises, sounds coming from the mountain of God: thunder, lightning and the sound of trumpets. The people respond not in celebration but with fear and trembling. It is an awesome thing to be in the presence of God but they demand of Moses: “You speak and we will listen.” They do not want God to speak directly to them. They feel that if they hear God’s voice surely they will die. There is something powerful in the voice of God, something they are not yet ready to hear. They want a human voice, a recognizable voice to follow. “You speak and we will listen.”

The writer of Hebrews begins his book with the assurance that the voice has come. God’s voice has now come in human form as they requested. In the past God has spoken in many, varied ways. God has spoken through burning bushes, angels, thunder, lightning and still soft voices. God has spoken through prophets, dreams and visions and occasionally through a donkey. God has used a variety of means to get people to listen, to respond and to obey. Even in the very act of creation the Word was spoken. Now, in these last days, God has spoken through a Son. John says in the prologue to his Gospel: “*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us*” (John 1:1, 14). The Son has now come, sharing God’s will for us, demonstrating God’s love. We now know what it means to live in the very image of God. The Son has come as the exact reflection of God’s glory: the very voice of God. Are we listening?

Whose voice do we want to hear? The world is full of conflicting voices today. We are between Democratic and Republican conventions. Each wants us to believe that they are right and the other is wrong. Every time we watch a television program we have commercials telling us that their product is better than another. We know that companies pay to have the best product placement in supermarkets and stores. Products located at eye level are seen to be better than those up higher or lower. We hear one car superior to another.

I remember when a member of one of the congregations I served bought a new car. It was a foreign make. Another member was very upset. Americans should only buy American. How could he buy a car made in a foreign country was the question. An answer was demanded. The new buyer simply went to his car, opened the door and there was the label of manufacture (all cars have them). It stated that the car was built entirely in the USA with American parts. He then went to the Buick and opened the door and pointed to the label. It read: “parts made in Mexico, assembled in Canada!” There are so many voices competing for our attention.

It is the same for religion. Who’s right? Who has the truth? Many claim to be the carrier of the truth but who is right? Again, there are voices from all directions. One leader of the religious right called for his followers to pray that it would rain Thursday night in Denver. He wanted God to rain on Obama’s celebration. It didn’t. Does that mean (oh, never mind) – our God is beyond that. But there are many who heeded his call.

There are those who want to define what it means to be a Christian, a follower of the living Christ. If you are a Christian you must act like this. If you are a Christian you must follow this list of do’s and don’ts. How else we will be able to tell if you are like us? This translation of the Bible is the one inspired by God, the others are false. A friend argued that the only true Bible was the Hebrew and Greek and anyone who was a “true” Christian would learn Hebrew and Greek and only read from the ancient text. Another friend asked, which Hebrew or Greek text? There are more than one. Which is the most reliable, the “true” text? The voices are there, each claiming to hold the truth. Which voice are we listening too?

The writer of Hebrews is right; we need to go back to Jesus. He is the one who spoke reflecting God’s glory. What is the response Jesus would give? What do the Gospels teach us about Jesus and his response to the situations around him? One example is about paying taxes. You remember they were out to trap him. Should we pay taxes to the government? His response was so simple, so uncomplicated. Give to God the things that are God’s and the government what is the government’s.

According to Jesus, love must be our first and highest priority (Read again John 14). It is hard to love and hate at the same time. We end up doing one and not the other. One will always win out over the other. We can’t do both. I wonder if we have ever seen love truly lived out in its fullest since Jesus. He is the very image of God – the reflection of God’s glory.

John said it this way, “*For God so loved the world...*” (3:16). The Word was spoken through a Son: If we have heard him we have heard God. If we listen for his voice we will not be wrong. The voice of the One who walked with all people. The voice of the One who stood for the poor, the oppressed, the widows and the orphans. The voice of the One who went the extra mile. The voice of the One who cared and loved those who stood on the outside looking in. The voice of the One who loved those on the inside who still got things wrong. The One who gave all that we might have life. It is not a bad voice to heed—but, are we listening?