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Last month on April 2, did you celebrate a 40th birthday? Something happened 40 years ago last month that continues to shape how we communicate with one another. What new piece of technology do you think was born 40 years ago?

In 1973 the first phone call was made on a handheld cellular device, which was much larger than today's phones. Forty years ago these new cell phones cost thousands of dollars more than the free phones one can now receive when starting a new phone contract. ¹

And then eleven years ago we began to hear a television commercial that asked, "Can you hear me now?" as one phone company informed us that they would go anywhere in order to test their phones to make sure we could be heard.

I sometimes wonder if God has been asking that same question: "Can you hear me now?" Throughout history God has been calling people to follow and trust in God's vision: Abraham and Sarah to travel to a new land; Moses' to leave the comfort of his family to challenge the Pharaoh; the young boy

Samuel unsure of the voice calling him three times in the temple until the priest Eli explained that God was calling him; Queen Esther who heard that it was such a time as this to save God's people; the prophet Jeremiah who thought he was too young to serve God; Jesus who invited fishermen to follow him to change the world.

I then think about how God has been calling in places that we might not have noticed: as Siddhartha sat underneath a tree and suddenly became awakened to understand life and became known as the Buddha; or Muhammad who heard the angel Gabriel speak words that eventually became known as the Quran and led to the formation of Islam. At each event I imagine God asking, "Can you hear me now?"

Today's scriptures seem to echo that same question in Proverbs and John's Gospel. In Proverbs, God's wisdom is portrayed as a woman who stands at the main gates into town. She yells out as people come and go through town,

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“You—I’m talking to all of you, everyone out here on the streets! Listen, you idiots—learn good sense! You blockheads—shape up! Don’t miss a word of this—I’m telling you how to live well, I’m telling you how to live at your best. Prefer my life-disciplines over chasing after money, and God-knowledge over a lucrative career. For Wisdom is better than all the trappings of wealth; nothing you could wish for holds a candle to her.”²

Sometimes we get so caught up in the voices around us telling us how to live our lives that we may miss the voice of God calling to us to shape our lives with God’s wisdom. I can almost imagine Lady Wisdom calling out in the streets, “Can you hear me now?”

God has offered wisdom throughout the ages, which is reflected in the story about a Zen master who is known for his wisdom, for always having the right answer to difficult questions. Then comes a day when one of his prideful disciples decides to challenge the

master. He holds a small bird in his closed hand and asks, “Master, is the bird alive or dead?”

The question is intended to be a trap. If the master says that the bird is alive, the disciple can merely crush it in his hand, place the bird at the feet of the master and say, “No, you are wrong. The bird is dead.” And if the master says, “The bird is dead,” the disciple can then prove the master wrong by opening his hand and letting the bird fly away. The master pauses, and then repeats the question: “Is the bird alive or dead?” And then he adds: “It is as you will.”³

I’ve been in conversations where someone asks a similar question: Is the church alive or dead? Many often tend to evaluate that question based on numbers of people in attendance, the amount of the church budget, or the number new members. Some may look at the statistics and get discouraged, adding that we don’t have “this” or we don’t do “such and such.”

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Is the church alive or dead? We might answer the question, “It is as you will.”

Want more people in church? Invite others. It is as you will.

Want more things for children and youth? Create events and invite them. It is as you will.

Short on money? Use the resources you already have and be generous with one another. It is as you will.

The community doesn’t know we exist? Invite them. It is as you will.

But it feels uncomfortable to try something new, doesn’t it? Sometimes in the midst of the changing world, we’re just not quite sure what to do, which I imagine is bit how the disciples felt when they began to realize that Jesus may not always be around. They were afraid they would not always be able to hear Jesus. In John’s Gospel we overhear a conversation between Jesus and his closest friends; he gives them reassurance that they will not be alone even after he is gone. “Even in the rough times ahead, you will not be alone. I am sending my

Spirit to comfort you. You may not understand everything I’ve been saying, but the Spirit will help you make sense of everything that has happened.”

In today’s world, it’s hard to make sense of everything that happens, not just in regard to the church, but through the media we become connected to the entire world. This week we felt the pain of those in the Midwest who faced 79 tornadoes spread across 10 states over three days, leaving paths of destruction. Our hearts especially felt torn as we heard about the EF 5 tornado that swept through Moore, OK, killing 24 people and destroying 13,000 buildings. In such times, it’s hard to make sense of the amount of destruction that exists in the world. We may worry about our own finances, our health, or about other changes in our lives, but then we hear of such destruction that we may become numb, unsure of how to respond. It’s at these times that Jesus’ words to his disciples reach out to us, reminding us that the Spirit still moves in our world, striving to bring healing in the midst of chaos. It’s a bit like one writer who recalled

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a memory of the fearful times he experienced as a child:

When I was a kid in our little two-bedroom home, my room was next to Mamma and Daddy's bedroom. But in those days it felt so far away when noises occurred in the night. I'd wake up and hear a squeaky floor and think "burglar." I would feel the windows rattle and think "tornado." And you know what I'd do? I'd get up in the dark and run to the other bedroom where Mom and Dad were sound asleep. I could tell where Dad slept because he was always snoring. I'd reach up and touch my Daddy's hand and everything was all right. I didn't have to say anything or even wake him up. That

touch-the assurance that Daddy was there was enough to allow me go back to my room and go to sleep. That's why we pray and don't lose heart. That's what prayer is-reaching out to touch God; to be reassured that God is still there; even if it is pestering God and God pestering us back. And that's reason enough to keep on praying...and not lose heart.⁴

In the midst of destruction in places nearby or in the farthest corners of the Earth, or even in the midst of changes in our own church, the promise that Jesus made to his disciples is still true today—we are not alone. Through the Spirit we hear Jesus ask, "Can you hear me now?" God's Spirit still moves among us. Keep on praying...do not lose heart.

¹ <http://www.nbcnews.com/technology/can-you-hear-me-now-cellphone-turns-40-1C9201090> and <http://www.nbcnews.com/id/51418790>

² Peterson, E. H. (2005). *The Message: The Bible in contemporary language* (Pr 8:3-6, 10-11). Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress.

³ Martin B. Copenhaver, "Life or Death? You Choose," Stillspeaking Daily Devotional, May 16, 2013.

⁴ Don't Lose Heart, Dan Ivins, ChristianGlobe Networks, Inc. from eSermons.