

The Voice on the Line

Job 38:1-7; 42:1-5

Crossroads Christian Church

Mark 10:46-52

October 25, 2015 Pentecost 22B

With our awesome technologies, communication is getting easier, or world is shrinking, and we can be drowned in a flood of messages. I chuckle when I see a young couple sitting together across a table on a date, and each staring at or texting on their own cell phone to somebody else. Communication in some ways has never been easier, but it's easy to lose focus on what we really want to say or hear because our attention is pulled this way or that by all the media around us. Maybe I'm just old and insecure, but I don't want my phone and my watch to be smarter than me.

Our scriptures today told us the stories of two people who desperately wanted to communicate with God or Jesus about their urgent needs. They didn't know whether God or Jesus would listen, hear, or even care, but they were both going to shout until they were heard, and not be content just to leave a message on the machine.

The first story is from Job, set in the far distant past. We all know bits and pieces of the story of Job—how he was a good and faithful, righteous and compassionate man, the patriarch of his family and pillar of the community. Then he lost everything. He lost his family. He lost his wealth. He lost his property. He lost his health. He crawled out to the ash heap at the edge of town, figuring that he was no more than trash anymore, and scraped the boils on his skin with a jagged piece of broken pottery. His friends came by and they tried to help. Each had their own easy diagnosis of Job's problem, and their own pat answer—"If you repent, God will forgive you, and everything will be okay." But Job might have said, "Repent? I haven't even repented yet!" The conversation grew more and more intense. The friends felt that Job was insulting God by not accepting his lot in life. Job became more and more frustrated. He *knew* that he didn't deserve the suffering that his friends assumed he did. Why do bad things happen to good people? Job wondered, "Or if I'm not good, what did I do wrong? Will God answer me? Again and again, Job cried out. Then God did respond to Job, but God answered none of Job's questions—at least not directly. Instead, God began to ask Job questions. Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Where were you when I taught the sea monsters how to swim and the eagles how to soar? Where were you when I laid the constellations across the sky? Do you understand the secrets of the universe?

Job never did get an answer to his questions, but he received something much more important. He discovered that the God of infinite

complexity and diversity, the God of mystery and wonder, the God of power and might, actually did care for him enough to respond. And that was all that Job needed. Job was restored to health and wealth, and he was vindicated in front of his friends, but all that was almost irrelevant, because more important, Job had seen and heard and experienced the presence of God.

In our gospel reading, another person cried out for attention, this time for Jesus. Bartimaeus had heard wonderful things about Jesus. Could Jesus help restore his vision? Would Jesus let him see again? So Bartimaeus waited. And one day he heard the crowd coming. He heard other voices cry out "Jesus, heal me." "Jesus, save me." Jesus was coming down the very road by which he sat. Would there be another chance? Would Jesus ever walk this way again? So Bartimaeus called out. "Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me!" The crowd tried to hush him. "Be quiet," they hissed. But Bartimaeus kept right on calling. Jesus stopped. Jesus asked them to send the blind beggar his way. Jesus didn't assume or presume what Bartimaeus needed, he asked. "What do you want me to do for you?" The beggar pleaded, "My teacher, let me see again." Jesus said, "Go. Your faith has made you well." And Bartimaeus regained his sight and followed Jesus.

We have all had times when we want to talk to God, and we're not quite certain whether God will listen. Maybe we haven't had desperate moments like those of Job or Bartimaeus, but still our hearts have ached and we've cried out our questions and hoped for an answer. Or maybe we just assumed that God has better things to do, and we just sat there depressed and turned in on ourselves.

There's an old story going around, called Information Please, and it goes something like this.¹

When I was quite young, my father had one of the first telephones in our neighborhood. It had a polished wooden case and was attached to the wall. I would listen with fascination as my father or mother talked into it. When I got old enough to reach it, I discovered that somewhere in this wonderful device lived an amazing person—her name was Information Please and there was nothing that she didn't know. She could supply anyone's phone number, and even give the correct time.

One day, when mother was visiting a neighbor across the back fence, I was playing with Daddy's tool bench and whacked my thumb with a

¹¹ Paul Villard. *Originally published June, 1966 Readers Digest; reprinted with permission in the December 1999 issue of the Singing Wires newsletter, TCI club.*

hammer. The pain was terrible, and nobody was around to give my sympathy. So I climbed up on the footstool, and held the receiver to my ear. "Information Please," I asked. A click or two and a clear voice spoke into my ear.

"I hurt my thumb..." I cried into the phone. Now the tears flowed, since I had an audience.

"Isn't your mother home?" she asked.

"No one's home but me," I replied.

"Are you bleeding?"

"No, I hit my thumb with a hammer and it hurts."

"Can you open the ice box?" she asked, and I answered that I could.

"Then take a little chip of ice and hold it to your finger."

After that, I called Information Please for anything. I asked her for help with geography and she told me where Philadelphia was. She helped me with my math. And then Petey, our pet canary died. I called Information Please and told her. She tried to console me, but I was heartbroken. How could a bird that sang so beautifully end up as a heap of feathers, feet up in the bottom of the cage? Then Information Please said quietly, "Paul, remember that there are other worlds to sing in." Somehow I felt better.

When I was nine, we moved away. Our new phone worked differently. There wasn't a nice lady inside. I grew up, went to college and started my own life. One day, I was back visiting my sister in my old home town, and I dialed for the operator, and there she was. "Information please." "Do you remember the little boy who hit his thumb with a hammer?" I asked. A long pause, then a soft friendly voice. "I guess that your thumb must be healed by now."

"So it's really you," I said. "I wonder if you have any idea how much you meant to me during that time?"

She said, "I wonder if you know how much your calls meant to me? I never had any children, and I used to look forward to your calls." I told her how often I had thought of her through the years, and I asked if I could call again the next back to visit my sister. "Please do," she said. "Just ask for Sally."

Just three months later I was back in my hometown. A different voice answered my call. I asked for Sally. "Are you a friend?" the woman asked. "Yes, a very old friend."

“Then I’m sorry to tell you that Sally has been working part-time for the last few years because she was sick. She died five weeks ago.” But before I could hang up, she said, “Wait a minute. Is your name Paul?”

“Yes.” “Well, Sally left a message for you. She wrote it down. Let me read it to you. It says, ‘Tell him I still say that there are other worlds to sing in. He’ll know what I mean.’”

I thanked her and hung up. I did know what Sally meant.

Today we have automated phone systems and don’t have Information Please. But we still have faith, we still have a biblical witness, that someone does listen, someone does care, someone does help. God not only listens, but encourages us to communicate. In Romans 8, Paul tells us that even when we can’t put the words together for our prayers, Paul God’s spirit helps us pray in sighs too deep for words.

Sometimes in the rush of data, the heaps of messages, in the tangle of life, in the noises that follow us everywhere, it’s hard to know what to do when encounter silence and rest. Let’s take some time this week to find some silence, to be alone with God. Let’s tell God what’s on our minds, knowing that the God who answered Job, the Christ who answered Bartimaeus, will listen for us, too.

And let’s take time to listen, in the silence. Let us take time to read the scripture and reflect on what God may want us to hear. Then we may find the peace that passes all understanding. Like Job, we may not get the specific answers that we want, but we will still receive the peace and joy, the awe and wonder, the love and hope of moments spent together with God. Amen.

By Michael E. Dixon