

Lent 1  
18/2/2024

Mark the Evangelist

Genesis 9:8-17

Psalm 25

Mark 1:9-15

The God who speaks softly

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Those things it is most important to say must be said softly.

We live in a noisy world. The wind howls, the waves crash, the thunder trembles, the lorikeets screech. And then, of course, there is the noise of life together: the streets, the alarms, the notifications, the arguments, the wars. The sheer sound volume of life is very often overwhelming, whether that noise is real or metaphorical. In such spaces, it seems that we must get ever louder if we are to be heard.

Given all that, at what volume do we imagine the voices speak in our reading this morning? The voice from heaven: *You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.* And Jesus' own voice: *The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe the good news.*

These are crucial words at the beginning of the Story of Stories. Spoken into a noisy world, they are not to be missed. In this clamouring world, then, does God shout to be heard? Does the voice from heaven thunder? Does Jesus cry out in the marketplace, to be heard over the clamour of store-holders and customers haggling over price and quality?

Speaking loudly, even *very* loudly, certainly has its place. With a shout we warn or threaten, we grab attention, or we lament or rejoice. And yet, when we hear an expectedly loud noise or voice, our immediate response is, "What? What's that?" This is because what is said loudly is rarely articulate; it is just loud. The greater the volume at which a conversation is conducted, the less we can say. Nothing subtle can be communicated with a shout. It may be a jubilant Yes or an alienating No, but that's about as far as yelling can go.

Still the temptation is strong, to raise our voice in order to be heard, to be seen, to be given attention. Within the church, the question is constant: how to attract new members? What is to be done, how are we to attract attention, as if shouting were ever attractive. Social media is a cacophony of voices seeking to be noticed, to be commented upon, watched, shared. Look at this, look at *me*, cry a thousand voices.

And yet perhaps the gospel is proclaimed this way: (*whispered*) This is my son; listen to him. In him is my kingdom come. If God is love, so that we are properly God's lovers, we want to keep in mind that lovers don't shout at each other. The voice which is open and receptive, and which gives and creates, is softly spoken. The world is filled, of course, with its thunderous tempests and its earth-shaking explosions but it is the still, gentle voice which touches and claims us: You are my son, my daughter; believe, turn to me.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is not a loud word. Of course, it has its own noise – the noise of the demon-possessed, the lament of the ill, the anger of the authorities, a loud cry from a cross. But, ending in just this way – in death – God's voice is not silenced but set in contrast.

The big thing God does in the world is – so far as the big world can see – a only small thing. The loud clarion call we wish would usher in the age of peace, the leader who will finally set all things right, the idea which is the solution to the equation of life – all of this turns out to be a quiet thing, a small thing, a thing which might be missed: one of us called to live a life of truth in the midst of untruth, to be quiet when the world is loud, to be himself.

This one God says, over here, almost out of sight, this one is my chosen; here I reign.

Come and see.

Come and believe.

Come and be changed.

Come and listen for God's small, quiet beginning, where there is  
whispered

a word of peace  
for this loud world.

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