

Epiphany 1, Year A, 2014
St James Episcopal Church, St James NY
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“The voice of the LORD is upon the waters;
the God of glory thunders;
the LORD is upon the mighty waters.”

These words
take us back
to the very beginning
of all creation
when everything
was formless and void
and darkness
was on the face of the deep.

And a wind from God
swept over the waters,
and God said,
“Let there be light.”

And there was light.

“The voice of the LORD is a powerful voice;” says the Psalmist.
“The voice of the LORD is a voice of splendor.”

And God said, “Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.’

And there was sky.

“The voice of the LORD is a powerful voice;
The voice of the LORD is a voice of splendor.”

And God said, “Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.”

And there was earth
and there were oceans.

“The voice of the LORD is a powerful voice;

The voice of the LORD is a voice of splendor.”

And God said, “Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it.”

And there was wheat and corn
and tomatoes and peas,
and cedars and oaks and apples.

“The voice of the LORD is a powerful voice;
The voice of the LORD is a voice of splendor.”

And God said, “Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth.”

And there was the sun
and there was the moon
and stars sprinkled
across the sky.

“The voice of the LORD is a powerful voice;
The voice of the LORD is a voice of splendor.”

And God said, “Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky.”

And there were whales and guppies, and starfish and seals,
and seagulls and swans and turkeys.

“The voice of the LORD is a powerful voice;
The voice of the LORD is a voice of splendor.”

And God said, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind.”

And there were elephants and giraffes,
snakes and sheep,
cats and dogs and even mice.

“The voice of the LORD is a powerful voice;
The voice of the LORD is a voice of splendor.”

And God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness."

And there were human beings, people, men and women,
made in the image of God
and God blessed them.

"The voice of the LORD is a powerful voice;
The voice of the LORD is a voice of splendor."

And then
the voice of the Lord
became quiet.
And God rested.

But that wasn't the end
of the voice of the Lord.
The voice of the Lord
was heard again,
time and time and time
again.

Occasionally
the voice of the Lord
spoke destruction,
the tower of Babel
crashing to the ground,
the water of the great flood
drowning the world,
and the prophets
warning
against turning away from God.

But far more often
the voice of the Lord
spoke promise.

It was the voice of the Lord
that called Abraham
out of his homeland
and into the promised land,
where he would have descendants
and they would be known
as God's own people.

It was the voice of the Lord
that spoke to Moses
from the flames
of the burning bush,
told him to take off his sandals,
and in spite of all of Moses' objections -
that he wasn't anyone special,
that he didn't know who this voice speaking was,
that no one would believe him,
that he was no good at speaking -
in spite of all that,
it was the voice of the Lord
that commissioned Moses
to lead the people out of slavery
into freedom.

And it was the voice of the Lord
that came to Elijah,
not in the great wind that knocked boulders free
and stripped the trees bare,
and not in the earthquake that shook the land
and made the mountains skip,
and not in the fire that scorched the earth,
not in any of those
but in a sound
of sheer
silence.

And commissioned Elijah
who was in fear of his life
to go
anoint a new king,
someone
who would lead the people
back to the way of God.

“The voice of the LORD is a powerful voice;
The voice of the LORD is a voice of splendor.”

And the voice of the Lord
continued to echo through the centuries,
calling,
always calling

the people of God
to faith.

And then one day
Jesus
went down to see
his cousin, John,
by the River Jordan.
A place, by tradition,
not so far from where the river
enters the Dead Sea.
It's not particularly wide there nowadays,
though you can see the multiple channels
where if the rain is good
and the agricultural land further north
doesn't suck up too much of the precious moisture,
multiple channels
where the river runs.
And tall reeds
on each bank,
and all around
low, stunted trees,
their roots starved for nourishment
in the sandy soil,
the desert hills and canyons in the background
a constant reminder
of the fragility
of human life.

And it is there
that John
baptizes his cousin in the water of the Jordan,
and the voice of God sounds
"This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."
And Jesus steps out of the river
and into the wilderness
for forty days,
and then begins the work
of teaching and preaching and healing
that will eventually bring him
to Jerusalem
and the cross
and the resurrection.

“The voice of the LORD is a powerful voice;
The voice of the LORD is a voice of splendor.”

And the voice of the Lord
continues to sound.
More often a whisper
than a shout,
sometimes
just an echo.

Sometimes
we hear the voice of the Lord
in Scripture,
calling us
to live in a way
that glorifies God,
offering us wise advice
for the situations
that we encounter
in our ordinary
everyday
lives.

That call
might be
about how we spend our money,
or how we handle a particular relationship,
or how we respond
to someone
in need.

But that’s not the only way we hear the voice of the Lord.

We may hear the voice of the Lord
in the church, the people of God,
encouraging us
or affirming us in our gifts.

That’s the way I heard God’s call to me
to preach,
and from that initial call
came ordination;
it’s the way that countless people
have heard the call
to take on leadership roles
as wardens or vestry members,

or to use their gifts in other ways
to the glory of God.

We may hear the voice of the Lord
in the liturgy
inviting us
to come closer
to God.

We may hear the voice of the Lord
in prayer,
assuring us of God's love,
prompting us to pray for someone,
urging us to take action
in the name of Christ.

“The voice of the LORD is a powerful voice;
The voice of the LORD is a voice of splendor.”
And the voice of the Lord sounds today.
It sounds today
as we baptize baby Tylie,
telling her
how much she is loved,
telling her
that she belongs to God.

Just as it sounded a few weeks ago
for her big brother Skyler
and prompted him
to reach out his hands
to receive the Eucharist for the first time.

And has sounded through the ages in this place,
calling people
to deeper faith.

And the voice of the Lord
is still calling, always calling,
always inviting us
to enter more and more
into life with God.

Listen.

