

## **Listening for God – June 7, 2015**

### **Genesis 3:8-15**

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School was out. Summer vacation had finally arrived. And a young boy and his best friend were out in the driveway playing basketball or at least attempting to shoot a few hoops. They were a bit small and their shots didn't always make it above the rim. After several minutes of missed baskets, the game got old, and they began to explore other options for entertainment. The friend sauntered over to a work table in the garage and started rummaging through the tools.

The boy hurried over and grabbed his friend's arm. He said, "You can't mess with that. My mother told me that I am not supposed to play with her tools." His friend looked at him in amazement and condescension and then said, "My dad lets me use his tools all the time. You're chicken!" And he began to make clucking noises while flapping his arms.

The boy felt his face get hot. "I am not chicken," he retorted. "I'm just not supposed to." He tried to pull his friend away from the work table, but the other boy wouldn't budge. His friend picked up the power drill and said, "I know how to use this. Here. Prove to me you're not chicken. Your mom isn't even home. She'll never know."

The boy was torn between wanting to follow the rules and wanting to prove to his friend he wasn't scared. He struggled inwardly. His friend knew how to use the drill. What harm could come of it? Maybe if he consented this one time, then they could go do something else. He grabbed the plug and plugged it in the outlet. They found a piece of scrap lumber and took turns drilling holes in it.

They laughed together, and the boy began to relax. This really isn't so hard, he thought. What's the big deal? Of course at that very moment, the drill bit broke off in the piece of wood. He looked at his friend in shock. "What do we do?"

"Hey, I don't know how to change the bit. I just drill holes!"

"Well, we have to do something. We can't leave it like this. My mother will know I was messing with her tools!" He frantically searched for drill bits on the work table. In his haste he knocked over a container of screws which then scattered all over the garage floor. The two boys dropped to their hands and knees to gather up all the loose screws.

The door to the kitchen opened and the boy's aunt appeared in the doorway. She saw their guilty expressions and said, "Well, I was going to ask if you wanted a snack. But I see that maybe it's time for you to come in and your friend to head home. You know you're not supposed to touch your mom's tools, right?" The boy nodded his head and then looked down. His friend shrugged his shoulders and said, "Sorry, dude." He grabbed his bike and headed out.

The boy's aunt told him to go sit in his room. His mother would be home soon. He sat on his bed and waited. From the silence of his room, he could hear the sound of kids laughing and playing down the street. Every few moments a shrill call of joy punctuated the murmur of happiness in the distance. A

single bird sang her dainty tune from a tree outside his window. In his misery and anticipation, his senses were heightened. He could hear so much going on in the world around him. Odd, since his life was on hold at the moment, waiting for his mom's reaction to his crime. The sounds were everywhere. The hum of a lawnmower powering a lawn mower. The bells of an ice cream truck on the next street over. The thump and chop of a hoe as his neighbor weeded the vegetable garden next door. The scampering of squirrel feet on the shingled roof above him. All around him were the sounds of summer. He felt chilled. It seemed so far from him right now.

And then he heard a sound that caused his breath to catch within his chest. The intimidating roar of a car engine pulling in the drive, choking all the other happy sounds. He had never before noticed its sinister growl. It revved angrily before powering off. The eerie creak of the car door opening and the harsh slam of it shutting. And did his mother always whistle such a disjointed, menacing tune, he wondered. Then he heard the voices of the adults, mumbling in monotones on the front porch. Then silence. The boy's heart pounded in his chest.

The front door opened slowly and quietly. There was a brief barely noticeable change in air pressure, then a sound of finality as it was closed. His fate sealed forever. The boy noted the clang of keys in the metal bowl on the table in the entryway. Then came the heavy, plodding, rhythmic steps as his doom ascended the stairway.

He couldn't take it any longer. The boy jumped off his bed and scurried into the closet, burying himself beneath a pile of dirty clothes. The steps drew ominously closer. Finally there was a light rapping on his bedroom door. Silence. Then a harder tapping of knuckles on wood. Silence.

His bedroom door opened ever so quietly. Someone entered the room. The mattress springs squeaked as weight settled down onto the bed. His mother's voice came, "Where are you, son? We need to talk."

As I was reading the lesson from Genesis, I wondered what it was like for the guilty couple to hear the sound of God walking in the garden. Was there a stirring or rustling of leaves? Maybe the occasional snap of a twig. The swish, swish, swish of tall grass or grain? Was there a sound of sandals slapping the dirt or of bare feet on earth?

In their fear and guilt, was the sound of God walking toward them an ominous portent? I wondered how that sound of God walking had changed from perhaps the day before? What might have once been a joyous sound, eliciting hopeful expectation. The text mentions it was at the time of the evening breeze. Was that a quiet, gentle sound of the wind tickling the plants, or more like the hot wind that blows through just before a storm?

What does God sound like to us? Think about that for a moment. Do you experience God in certain sounds? For some of you, the sound of God comes in the happy cry of a newborn baby. Or maybe there is a particular voice in song that stirs up for you images of God. Maybe it's a day out on the lake. The gentle lap of waves against the shore or up against the boat, drifting out on the water. It might be the hum of honey bees pollinating your flowers or garden. It could be the contented purring

of your cat curled up in your lap, or the joyful yipping of your dog wanting to play. Do we hear the sound of God in the awesome power of the thunder that comes in a summer storm?

One of my very first experiences of God came through my love of music. In the beauty of great music I couldn't help but be aware of the immensity of God's creativity. The gift of music was a very real sign to me that not only did God exist, but that God was generous, to give humanity such a glorious thing. The interweaving of sounds was so amazing to me.

For many, the sound of God comes through the experience of ministry and good works. To a community that is reeling from the effects of a devastating tornado, the sound of God may come as trucks pulling in filled with donations of food and water, or as the tearing of a check out of a checkbook as donations are raised for the relief efforts. For someone in prison, the sound of God may come as the voice of one of the guards saying, "You have a visitor today." For someone who is homeless, it might be in the voice of the volunteer saying, "yes, we do have a room available for you and your family." For the one who is hungry, it is the sound of paper bags being filled with groceries. For the child who is struggling in school, it is the voice of her mentor that comes each week to the afterschool program.

But for others, the sound of God comes as the tragedy itself. God was in the roar of the tornado that destroyed our community. God is the landlord who says, "You're evicted." Or the government agent who says, "Your food stamps have been cut." Or the volunteer who says, "We can't help because you don't qualify for our program." For these folks, God doesn't care about the daily lives of average people. God doesn't care about showing kindness and generosity.

In Jesus Christ we were shown what God is like. Jesus was the Incarnation of God. Through his teaching we learned that God desires reconciliation with us, the estranged children. God comes offering mercy and love. Even from the cross, Jesus was able to say, "Forgive them. They don't know what they're doing."

It seems like how we hear or experience God is related to where we are in relationship to God. If we think of God as a brutal judge, dispensing justice without mercy, we may have a great deal of anxiety or fear, as we expect a harsh punishment. Yet if we know God as one who tempers justice with love and mercy, we can hear God as one who welcomes us with an attitude of forgiveness and redemption.

From the closet, the young boy could hear the knocking on his door, but he didn't move. His bedroom door opened ever so quietly. Someone entered the room. The mattress springs squeaked as weight settled down onto the bed. His mother's gentle voice came, "Where are you, Adam? We need to talk." And in that voice, he heard the sound of love and acceptance. He crawled out of the closet and up into his mother's lap. He knew he would have to face up to disobeying his mom, but he also knew he would always be loved and forgiven.