

So Adam and Eve were able to hear God as they were hanging out in the garden. What exactly does that sound like anyway? How do *we* know, for sure, when we hear God for ourselves? You know, for awhile growing up, I was told many times that I had this “God voice.” Unfortunately, it did get to my head from time-to-time. I was proud, when I was asked to read a lesson during worship or do some narrator-part for a play.

And then it came time for my senior recital, when I was supposed to play a few piano pieces as well as sing a couple songs; but, to make matters worse, my piano and voice teacher thought it was a great idea to record the whole thing, so I could have it for posterity sake, or who knows what else. Soon enough, after weeks had passed, I managed just enough guts to play that cassette tape, and, let’s just say, I could not have been more disappointed in my voice. It wasn’t about whether I was in tune or brought enough emotion into the songs; it’s that my voice was not that impressive, really: it wasn’t as low or as deep as I had always thought and hoped. It just wasn’t...James-Earl-Jones-esque enough. Of course, that means I had already fallen for the trap: that God’s voice had to be this low, deep, authoritative, almighty-masculine voice.

So then a few years later I was working as a camp counselor at Lutheran Memorial Camp, just north of Columbus, and again, the rumor spread that I had this “God-voice” to the point that I was asked to be “God’s Voice” in this Passion play we performed around the main part of the camp, where we went from different spots as camp counselors and staff acted out scenes for the Confirmation students to get a better understanding of Jesus’ life, including that most holy week leading up to the cross and the empty tomb. For my part, I was “God’s Voice” for Jesus’ baptism: so, I would always hide up on a hill far away behind a bunch of trees and shouted down for everyone to hear, “This is my Son, the beloved, listen to him!”

Again, reinforcing the idea that God’s voice had to be this this low, deep, authoritative, almighty-masculine voice. Now that may not have been the intention behind the camp staff or any other Christian who subconsciously thinks God shouts down from a kingly throne in the heavens through a white beard and the deepest of pitch that can make the entire earth rattle at its core; that is, until we are proven otherwise: that somehow, somehow, God can speak through the voices we did not seriously consider before.

It even happened at that very same church camp with *female* camp counselors, not just because they were able to read out-loud God’s parts in

Scripture for the Confirmation students to hear in Bible study, but because they developed meaningful relationships with those young girls, even in just a week's time. It was because they established a safe and open environment to allow the students to talk about their faith in a way that they would never be judged over or embarrassed by at all. Those female camp counselors, whose voices God worked through just as much as any from the bass vocal range; they firmly established a spiritual foundation of curiosity and amazement for those young girls to build upon for the rest of their life.

Because, you see, God's voice is not always about shouting down. God's voice also works by giving a voice to people who feel as if they have no say in this life at all. For those young women who took a summer to be camp counselors out in the middle of nowhere; that was just the beginning for them, for them to be a voice for the often-voiceless. They turned out to be teachers, nurses, occupational therapists, artists, even one who worked at the United Nations for human rights. In so many walks of life, God is working through those women to be advocates for others who feel as if their voice is never heard at all, for people who think so much is being taken away from them and no one seems to care. God's voice is not just about shouting down; it is also about empowering others' voices: for their cries to be heard by the

world that is meant to be here, through God's grace, to help them in their need.

So, looking back, when I was in the woods about to shout down God's line from Jesus' baptism: it would have been better for the young people to hear in no uncertain terms, "You are all my children. You all have a voice. You all have me working in you for a lifetime and beyond." Unfortunately, the church has not always proclaimed such authentic words of God. We did not always value the voice of women, and plenty of times, still, the church puts them down without even realizing it. It took us far too long to not only allow, but encourage women to be pastors; and, I should mention, some of those young girls and women who went through that camp that summer, turned out to be pastors: to be a voice for the often-voiceless. To make sure that all children of God never forget: that not only do they have a voice, but they have a voice that is valued, that is treasured, that has something to offer for the betterment of the church and the entire world. God's voice is not about shouting down; it is about lifting us up with the very same Holy Spirit that unleashed a Resurrection of new life for *all* of God's children then, now, and forevermore. And for that, we most certainly give thanks to God indeed!

Amen.