

Raising the Volume of God's Voice

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So today we're talking about speaking out for God.

The moments we step out from all of the silent stuff that passes through our minds,

And give sound to those thoughts. Those feelings,

And we turn them into something shared.

Something *experienced*, in the world.

Our lectionary brings us to the topic, but it seemed like God was talking about it all week,

Definitely outside of those pages,

Because things just kept popping up leading back to this idea.

Friends, family, people experiencing crisis outside, in the world,

all chimed into these sounds God was making,

by raising up words of their own,

in moments they felt it was most important they were said.

Ky and I were out at the wedding, so we were surrounded by family,

On both sides. My little brother and his bride, Amanda had just gone through a terrible ordeal,

Amanda having lost the pregnancy just a week and a half before,

My cousin, Jason, was out, and he's been going through some really tough times in his life,

getting things together, struggling through breaking free from addictions,

and starting fresh when he starts school at Rutgers in just a couple of weeks.

My older brother was out from Boston, and not getting to see him too often,
there's always this urgency felt inside to be more open in our friendship and words.

And on top of this, all of the single people from Amanda's side of the family---
---people I'd never met, but became pretty quickly familiar with---
---were going through some hard stuff, too,

...Seeing the wedding and how much Tommy and Amanda loved and supported each other,

Wanting and hoping to one day find that kind of companionship for themselves.

So many moments cried out for not just a desire,
but a *need* to open our mouths and let out what was inside.

To consent to taking thoughts from deep down in those silent parts of our hearts,
And giving them, freely, when they were needed.

Over just a few days, I wound up talking to my cousin about the stuff he's been dealing with,

Then openly sharing that love and time with Ted,

Then confessing to my little brother how proud I was of him,
and how happy I was to watch Amanda officially become a part of the family,
after so many years of already knowing her as a sister.

And also talking with him about what happened,
sharing my own experiences of loss in conceiving.

I even wound up having to stand in as a sideline cheerleader
to one of the guests I didn't know,
---the son of Amanda's stepmom---

who'd for whatever random reason, opened his heart to Ky and I
 about the vulnerability and fears he felt about being single.

Ky was there---pretty intense, right?

Tears and nose wiping. And the bar hadn't even opened yet!

I think we all experience moments like these...

...Maybe not so many at one *time*, but

In different minutes of our lives,

We're asked to give back what we've been given.

In all of these things we think and feel after being shown certain things in the world,

And in our lives, we're asked to show and tell what has come to our own mind and soul,

So that other people can see more than what their own experiences have made clear.

So that our experience can deepen the experience of others.

So that what's changed us, might change someone else, standing near.

And we don't just do it in times of needed moral support and strength

between us and the people around us.

But we run into it---into this deep need---too, in our experience of talking about God.

And ooof. Wow. Those times... those times tend to be even just a little bit tenser, don't they?

In that quiet that follows a question about God, or our beliefs---

---that sweats blooms just a little faster. A little thicker.

Our throats swell up, open just enough to let in the air required to live.

And nothing more! Right?

Almost as if our very bodies are trying to hold down tighter all of that stuff deep inside.

Because it comes from the deepest parts. The most sensitive parts.

The most important parts of who we are,

and how we understand the life within us and around us.

...But still, despite all of that, we're asked to share. Still, we *need* to share.

With even more urgency than assuring Charlie he won't be single forever

and that his job traveling the world only increases the statistical odds

of his finally finding his soulmate---

We're drawn to step out from those far corners of our thoughts,

and *give* to the space *outside* of us,

Our feelings, and understandings, and experiences.

Not for the sake of romantic relationships, or overcoming challenges at school,

but for the sake of giving sound to our quietest and most precious thoughts

about our experience of the Holy Living God.

And to do *this*, takes alotta guts. A lot of giving. And whole lot of love.

Over the past week, our blog and facebook posts have all centered on these experiences

Of talking, and sharing in these sometimes very tense moments.

And our scripture readings each tell us about similar experiences

for Jeremiah, the young prophet,
and for Jesus, as he stands against the ruling religious order trying to keep people down
just for the sake of keeping broken things the same.

Jeremiah is asked by God to stand up and speak out---
---and what's Jeremiah's reaction?

I love his response:

"Ah, Lord GOD!" He says.

"Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy."

I can relate, having been called at the same age to the ministry, as Jeremiah was, here.

His hesitation and his fear, knowing he's just young,

worrying he won't find the words, and that even if he did, that no one would listen.

That tension, in being called to take out those deepest parts inside
and spread them into view, so openly.

In our reading from Luke,

While teaching in the synagogue,

Jesus is asked to cure a woman who's been crippled for 18 years.

He steps up, and he shares the love of God with her from everything he's got inside,
healing her to stand straight.

And then what happens? The leader of the synagogue is gives Jesus GRIEF
for healing a crippled woman on a Sabbath day!

But does Jesus back away?

He stands straight himself against all of instinct inside,

and speaks from his heart, even though the risk in front of him is clear.

And he shares with that religious leader the truth of God yelling in his soul,
which tells us that love is never wrong no matter the day, or the place, or the person.

How many times have you been called out to step up?

How many times have you been asked to speak out

what's inside about what you've felt in God?

...How did it feel? What did you say?

Like you, and like them, I've been in places like this before, myself.

We're all asked to do it. And it's never easy to take that first step.

To make that first sound.

Just Friday night I was talking with an atheist, named Christian, at a bar

---young kid—24---and he asked me, on the spot, to share with him

what I believed about God. Just out of the blue over a glass of Blue Moon.

--No joke! Sounds like the start of a country song, but all of that's true!

I swallowed, awkwardly cleared by throat, then *let it out*.

I've shared with you that time I felt frightened but overwhelmingly drawn—called---

---to stand up in that food court on that table, as a teenager,

and talk about God being the very life in our souls,

and that we should enjoy every second of it.

I've shared with you that incident with the ravenous mob,
and yes---even every Sunday, giving the sermon---
---it's pure proof of God and a miracle *itself* that I get through these things,
because I'm scared to death of public speaking!
I shouldn't even be here!

But a far more moving story filled the headlines this week, that I have to share.

And I think a lot of preachers are probably doing the same, this morning.

It perfectly exemplified what it means to stand up and speak out,
even when you're afraid.

You know what I'm talking about? That awesome lady down in Georgia.

Antoinette TUFF.

The woman working the front desk, who stood up
and talked down that gunman from opening fire on the school.

An amazing story.

And I'm so glad it was covered so fully---

---because usually those guys only dwell on the bad stuff.

She talked him into putting down the weapon.

Do you guys remember the words she spoke to him?

This young man, heavily armed, standing right in front of her, out of sorts.

She said, "'It's going to be all right, sweetie. I just want you to know I love you, though, OK? And I'm proud of you. That's a good thing that you're just giving up and don't worry about it. We all go through something in life.'"

She later told the 911 dispatcher, “Let me tell you, I’ve never been so scared in all the days of my life. Oh Jesus!”

And in one of the first articles I read, when asked what she was thinking at the time, she said she just wanted to give God’s love, and that through each of those tense minutes, she wasn’t thinking anything. She was praying.

I can’t imagine a tenser, more frightening moment, calling you to stand and speak.

Just like in any moment we’re unexpectedly asked to speak for the sake of God and giving God’s love,

She had a choice to swallow all of the thoughts she had inside.

She had a choice to cower under the desk and hide away.

Protecting herself. And it wouldn’t have been the act of a coward---
---but only natural instinct to survive.

(Do we feel that in our hearts when asked to talk about God?)

But instead, in that quiet. In that space. In that pause.

That woman rose up straight, and she let what was in her heart out, to give back to the life in front of her what she so far knew.

She shared her thoughts and God’s love fully, right there, in the open.

Vulnerable, in danger.

Asked, in that tension, looking into that person holding that gun, to let God out, and let God live between them.

And I think she was able to do that, because she knew she wasn't alone.

And though Antoinette Tuff's story is remarkable in its extremes,

That same truth guides us and protects each one of us,

In each of the times we're asked to dig deep from our soul

and let our thoughts about God, and our love for God, out.

In Jeremiah 1:4-10,

What does God say to that young, called kid,

when Jeremiah is responding to God's call with fear and hesitation?

Verse 7- 8 says:

7 But the LORD said to me, "Do not say, 'I am only a boy'; for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you, 8 Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the LORD."

Verse 9:

9 Then the LORD put out his hand and touched my mouth; and the LORD said to me, "Now I have put my words in your mouth."

In each of these moments, some extreme, some casual---all, out of the blue---

When we're unexpectedly asked to speak for God.

To share what's in our hearts about that Holy Life we love,

We are never alone. We're never abandoned.

As frightening as it is, we need never hide away, because we stand always in the presence of God,

In the love of God.

And no matter how we might fumble or shake,

God lifts us up with unending support as we use our mouths
to raise the volume of God's voice in the world.

And God spoke a lot in the world, this week, didn't He?

Didn't She, didn't It?

Didn't we?

When we find ourselves in these moments that ask for our voice---

--whether we're standing in a bridesmaid's dress, or at home, on the phone, in our
pajamas---

---as God speaks *to* us and *through* us, let God breathe in your words.

With each sound, let God empower you to transform the world into that unshakable realm
of love, which is the Kingdom of God.

Open up and let it free.

Give up what's inside and let God be.

Amen.