

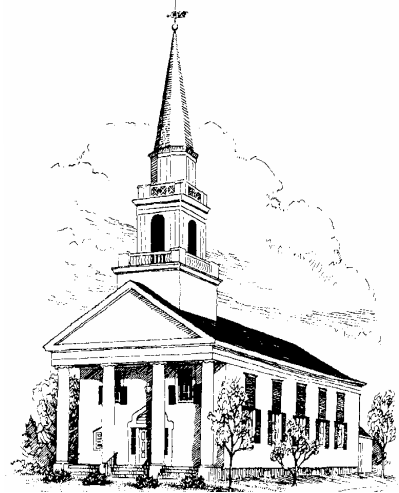
# Mystic Congregational Church, UCC

## Mystic, Connecticut

Sermon from January 11, 2009

Rev. Ann M. Aaberg  
**“Selective Hearing”**

Scriptures:  
Genesis 1:1-5  
Mark 1:4-11



When my husband Doug and I first began to blend our families together, just about 20 years ago now, we noticed that the youngest of our sons seemed to be occasionally non-responsive. It would take several calls to the dinner table before he would finally arrive; sometimes our questions directed to him would be met with blank looks; when we called him in from outside play, sometimes we would have to physically go out ourselves and retrieve him. Our frequent question was, “Are you listening?” At first it was quite frustrating, but then it became worrisome to the point that we suspected he might have difficulty hearing. He had had tubes in his ears as a very young child, multiple ear infections, and he was the one who would agonize in pain with blocked ears after a plane trip.

We made an appointment with our pediatrician for a hearing test to rule out hearing loss. After his examination, the doctor began a conversation with Doug and me in a low, somewhat subdued tone, in the examining room with his back to our son, and right in the middle of his remarks, without turning to face him, Doug quietly said, “Son, would you like some ice cream?” “Yeah!” he eagerly replied and the doctor looked at both of us and smiled and said, “There’s nothing wrong with his hearing. He suffers only from ‘selective hearing’—hearing only what he wants to.” Well, of course, we were relieved, but only until we realized that now we had other issues to deal with, the immediate one being to take him for ice cream.

In both our readings this morning and in Psalm 29, which we used for our Call to Worship, we hear about the voice of God. In the first creation story in Genesis, God creates the heavens and the earth by first uttering words, by saying, “Let there be light.” The psalmist hears the mighty and powerful voice of the Lord in a thunderstorm which travels from the Mediterranean Sea inland through Lebanon and out to the wilderness of Kadesh, in thunderclaps, wind, shaking and breaking trees. And with the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist, we read that the heavens are torn apart and a voice comes from heaven.

We read about the voice of God throughout the Bible, from God addressing Moses up through the various prophets. Some of you may remember an early comedy routine by Bill Cosby rendering his interpretation of the conversation between God and Noah. God’s was the deep, booming, powerful male voice barking instructions at Noah.

Yet in one of my favorite passages about God speaking, it's to the prophet Elijah who is told that the Lord is about to pass by. And it reads:

*"Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence...Then there came a voice to him..." (excerpted from 1Kings 19:11-13).*

I have a friend who chooses to hear the voice of God in the movement of the wind, whether it be gentle breezes or sudden gusts. Her source for this is the rush of wind which accompanied the visit of the Holy Spirit in tongues of fire upon the apostles after Jesus' ascension. We also read of Samuel in the Bible, under the tutelage of the high priest Eli, who keeps waking up one night to his name being called, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel keeps getting up and going in to the next room to Eli—"Did you call me?" "No, go back to bed." Until it finally dawns on Eli that Samuel is being called by God.

From silence to storms to salutations, the voice of God as portrayed in our Holy Bible comes in a variety of ways. And despite our own individual spiritual experiences of hearing God, whether it be a gut feeling or a faint intuition, we hear many lament today in our contemporary age about our not hearing from God in the same way as our ancestors did.

We have scientific explanations now for thunder. It's not the angels bowling in heaven like we used to say as kids. And even with the scientific explanations for tsunamis and tornadoes and hurricanes, our post-modern Protestant Christian sense of God tells us that our God of love does not intentionally send destruction our way, does not intend to terrify us. But, certainly the tremendous power we witness in nature which renders us humans *powerless* is a call to remember the almighty power of God our Creator.

Yet, even in our stormy Psalm 29 this morning, we read that the Lord sits enthroned *over* the flood. The psalmist writes that this same Lord with all God's mighty power empowers *us* with strength and can bless God's people with peace. In our creation story in Genesis, after each of God's creating commands, God notes that it is good. God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness.

And as Jesus comes up out of the water, yes, he sees the heavens tear apart, but the Spirit descends... like a dove. And the voice from heaven says, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

That same God of mighty wild power also began making order out of chaos through the creation of the universe, by creating light and separating it from the darkness of the deep; and God came to earth as the fully human/fully divine Jesus to continue to show us the light: the light of gentleness and the light of patience; the light of love and the light of mercy.

On this Sunday when we remember the Baptism of Jesus Christ in the river Jordan, we are invited to contemplate the significance of our own baptisms. Jesus comes up out of the wa-

ter, and as I remember our young son's ears, I think of all of our kids that summer coming up with ocean water or pool water in their ears, unable to hear quite right for a while, and then joyously announcing later that night to the entire household when the water left them and they were clear again.

Friends, in our noisy, busy, very rational world, the question is not *how* we hear God's voice today, but if we bother to listen for it at all. Regardless of how you might feel about the use of this phrase, God is still speaking. And we are called to remember our Baptisms, the washing away of iniquity by the grace of God and our rising up out of the deep chaotic water, with clean bills of spiritual health, cleared to hear. With no reasons to claim otherwise, except of our own choosing, to ignore the voice of God.

The voice of God calls to us from the mouths of the hungry, from the shivers of the homeless, from the cries of the oppressed, from the moans of the unjustly imprisoned. The voice of God calls to us from the squeals of animals and fish and birds as their planet home deteriorates. The voice of God calls to us from our own insides when we engage in self-destructive behavior. *And* the voice of God calls to us through music and soothing rainfall and doorbells and people who say, "Can I help you?" or "I've missed you" or "I love you." And the voice of God calls to us from the depths of our souls reminding us we are God's children, we are loved by God, and we can find peace in the comfort of Christ.

Whether we are able to hear God in the loud crash of the waves on the seashore or, with advancing age or limitation, can only tune in to God's quiet whisperings in our souls, the voice of God is still loud and clear, if we only pay attention. May we put aside our selective hearing, hearing only what we choose, and respond to God in a way that affirms that, yes, we are still listening. Amen.

