

SERMON
PSALM 85: 8-13
“LET US HEAR”

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH - WINSTON SALEM, NC

JULY 15, 2018

AMY R. MCCLURE

Sermon Title: "Let Us Hear"

Sermon Reference: Psalm 85:8-13

His name was Bill Kanos and he went to my home church faithfully every Sunday and sat half way up the aisle. Lots of folks went to church faithfully, but Bill was an inspiration. You see, Bill was a prisoner of war back in WWII. He was part of the 82nd airborne as a paratrooper. While in England, he did many high risk jumps and as he was practicing jumping off towers to prepare for D-Day, the man next to him messed up and Bill got pushed off the tower with no time to pull his parachute. When he landed, he broke his back and was placed in a full-body cast and missed D-day. After he healed, he then went back and did jumps in Belgium where he was captured and spent a year as a prisoner of war. After years of making high risk jumps and putting so much strain on his body, he ended up having metal rods all through his body. He walked carefully, slowly, hunched over. He struggled physically with every moment of every day, not able to sit up normally, stand normally, or function like most people. And yet, he showed up every Sunday. The only way he could sit in the service was to use a lawn chair that was low to the ground and stretched out so that he could almost lie flat. One day, as a young teenage, energetic speaker, I stood in that pulpit and was sharing stories and giving part of my testimony. I was so excited just to be there and to be part of that church. After the service, just as I always did, I went over to Bill and we chatted for a bit. I loved hearing him tell stories and talk about life. After that day of speaking in the pulpit, he grinned and said "I just love watching you tell your stories and the energy you bring, I only wish I could hear you.... In order to understand you." :-)

Truly, hearing and understanding are gifts (pause) and as we turn to Psalm 85 today, we, the readers of this passage, can see that the psalmist/the writer of this song is wanting to hear and understand what God the Lord will speak and is awaiting salvation, but has no idea what that will look like. The book of Psalms means “Hymns of praise.” We know that not all the Psalms are technically “hymns of praise,” but we do know that they are true and accurate based on the people whose faith and suffering, reflection and triumph, have produced them.

With that being said, Psalm 85 is actually considered a song of Lament - a song of grief and sorrow - and we see this longing for salvation for the people and this longing that God’s glory may dwell in their land...that the Holy of Holies come back to Zion and God’s favor be restored to them. In verses 10-11, we see the words steadfast love, faithfulness, righteousness, and peace. These are classic words for the covenant bond - the commitment, the guarantee - that unites God and people - terms that always characterize God’s dealings and *should* characterize the acts and behaviors of God’s people. The people are grieving because they are expecting to be able to discern the divine will of God at the Temple, but their lives seem a bit lost as they long for salvation and desire for God to show favor to them. Keep in mind that the context for the folks in this time period is a people who have yet to experience Jesus.

The Psalmist has no idea the magnitude of the comment “righteousness and peace will kiss each other.” Righteousness meaning that God is a righteous God - God WILL make things right in this world. God’s righteousness - God’s way is the best and right and perfect way of justice and truth. God brought peace to this world and that peace came in the form of Jesus. John 1, we read “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...and the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as

of a father's only son, full of grace and truth." (say softly) Righteousness and peace meet and his name is Jesus. Let us hear what God the Lord spoke when Jesus showed up.

THERE is the hope - we know what God spoke, because God became flesh and every word out of the mouth of Jesus is what God said and is saying. To those who have come before us... and to us today... and to those who will come after us. So how does steadfast love and faithfulness meet? Perhaps when Jesus said " Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."

Knowing our current political climate in our country, it is easy to take that commandment from God and use it as a political statement, and yet, we as a church do not endorse any political party. We are followers of Jesus Christ and no matter what country we find ourselves in and no matter what season of that country's life, God's word does not change based on politics. Do we hear what God spoke into being through Jesus? Are we listening? (pause)

We live in a world where people have lost the art of listening to other people. I know many of my friends in ministry who have to preach every Sunday and they often say that there are folks in their congregations who "listen" to every word he or she says because their ultimate goal is to find something to criticize about what that preacher says, even if it's just one word. And yet I know that every single one of these friends always prays that familiar verse from Psalm 19 - "May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord."

The other day I was watching the news and a news anchor asked the person being interviewed a question. The person got maybe two words out before the anchor was already

interrupting this person, talking over him, and changing the entire direction of the conversation.

Why did he even ask the question if he wasn't interested in ****hearing**** this person? This

anchor was looking for that one word to criticize instead of listening to the heart of this person.

The other day there was a facebook post by someone who made a blanket statement about

millennials. Our pastoral team knows my passion about not placing anyone in categories and

assuming people are the same. As someone who falls in the millennial age group, I often speak

up when folks try to put me in a category. On this particular day, I responded on facebook

stating that the comment about millennials did not apply to me as a millennial, which then led to

someone I know blasting me on a personal level on this very public platform. I was shocked that

this person I knew would be so quick to use such critical words toward me. I quickly reached

out and asked to meet with this person face-to-face to try and understand why there was such a

deep level of anger directed at me. As I asked for a date on the calendar to grab coffee, this

person wanted to continue to talk over me to prove some point that I was completely lost in and

clearly not understanding what was happening. I have yet to hear back from this person on when

we can get together and have coffee to have a real conversation. Real conversations are scary

because it means we have to look at someone in the eyes - that someone whom is made in the

image of God - and practice what we believe and know to be true - that Jesus is the salvation that

has come, where peace and righteousness meet and has commanded us to love one another - and

that can be hard work. Let us hear each other because when we do, we catch a glimpse of God

speaking through us and in us and we see those moments of the pure love of Jesus as we love one

another.

Do we hear what God the Lord spoke and is speaking? Or are we listening to something or someone else? Or are we not listening at all? Just as we heard in our Ephesians passage today read by Fran, God “chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will. In him we have redemption and forgiveness and he lavishes on us so much grace that we can’t even imagine. All of this is through Jesus!

There is a book by Shane Hipps called “Selling Water by the River.” (let me say that again) “Selling water by the river.” Often, folks fall into the trap of setting up a water stand, just like a lemonade stand, to sell water to those passing by who are thirsty. The issue is that the river, filled with much more amazing water than a small water stand can hold, is right next to our water stand. Clearly this is referring to Jesus. We try so desperately to put Jesus into these amazing packaged bottles of water and we label it as we see fit and make it look pretty and appealing to others. “If you just behave right, then you will be fulfilled in life. Here, drink this.” “If you just do this church thing the right way and be on the right committees, then you will feel good about your life. Here, drink this.” “If you read your bible just like I read my bible, then obviously we can both then believe in Jesus and everything will be just peachy. Here, drink this.” “If you go to the right stores and wear the right brand of clothing, then you will fit in and be happy. Here, drink this.” (pause) And then we often put things on these labels like “to fully experience Jesus, you must do _____ or believe _____....Here, drink this.” And yet, as we stand at our water stand and try our best to sell some kind of water that we and our culture think will bring joy and happiness to folks, the river of life is right there beside us. Perhaps we are just called to lead people to the water and give them the freedom and space to fully experience the

water of life in all of its glory and all of its magnitude. This is God's desire for the world that all experience the living water - the salvation of Jesus Christ - the same salvation that our Psalmist was longing for in Psalm 85. When we hear what God the Lord speaks, this is what happens - we begin to understand it and experience it fully. When we try to make it something it's not, we end up bound to our little water stands on the side of the river and holding tightly to our own business plan of how water should be distributed to the world - perhaps all good intentioned, but preventing others from seeing and experiencing the living water found in Jesus. **If one wants to know exactly how righteousness and peace hold together, we do not start with what we think that means, we start with how this is embodied in Jesus.**

Are we so passionate and energetic about things that aren't always truly Gospel-centered that the world is looking at us and watching us, and perhaps smiling at us and saying "we love your energy and your passion, we only wish we could hear you...in order to understand you." We say we want to preach Jesus to the world in the way we live and the way we speak, and yet we often cloud the message with our own agendas, our own words, our own emotions. We've put up an emotional wall with our neighbors, with our families, and with our friends when we hear something that we don't like. *Let us hear each other.*

We often get questions about how our staff functions and how we communicate. We have great conversations, we see each other at our best and at our worst, we've learned how we each function in high stress situations, in moments of joy, moments of sadness, etc. We also lovingly disagree on things because not one of us are the same. We don't have to be the same, but we are one in Christ. I, for example, often get zoned in on details about how we function as a church and how programs are schedule and run, and that can be a gift to our staff most of the

time :-), but praise the Lord for a pastor who pulls me out of that at times and says “it is more than just the details.” And many times my passion for details being done right help our staff stay focused because we want to be intentional about our goal to share Jesus with the world. We need each other and all of our quirky personalities - and we can only have that fully if we listen to each other and respond in a way that proves we believe that salvation **has** come through Jesus and we have heard what God the Lord spoke and is speaking. Faithfulness is springing up from the ground...The Lord has given what is good...and righteousness has made the path for us to step and move forward together in this beautiful season of our church life and in this relationally difficult season in the life of our country and in our world.

Do we live in a way that reflects that we have heard God the Lord speak? Do we live in a way that demonstrates that we believe that salvation has been given to us through Jesus? Do we live in a way that reminds us that peace and righteousness have kissed - that God’s will be done on earth as in heaven? That we believe John 1:14 when it says that the “Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth?” When people listen to Christians speaking, are they confused or are we speaking in a way that helps them hear and understand God clearly?

Recently a friend of mine was sharing part of her story with me from a difficult time she had over the last couple of years. In a high-anxiety situation with the loss of her father, working a full-time job, serving on church committees, and caring for her children, life was a bit overwhelming. That’s when she found that one rhythm in every day that helped ground her... going to get a cup of coffee from Starbucks. The coffee was okay she said, but the main thing that helped get her through the day was when she walked in to that Starbucks, the barista greeted

her with a big smile and called her by name...every day. And so too, the church as followers of Jesus, should greet all people and love all people the way God calls us to do so - the way Jesus taught us to do. And to call one another by name as we look at each other the way God looks at us and to love each other the way God loves us. That's how we know we are hearing and responding to the voice of God and people will know we are disciples of Jesus by the way we love one another.

One of you in this room read the eblast this past week and saw the title of this sermon today. You texted me these words that seem fitting for all of us today: "Let us hear...let us hear the tiny voices from the deep recesses, let us hear the voices that shout loudly, let us hear the small and gentle voice that proclaims....Jesus Loves me!" Yes - Jesus loves me...and you...this I know...for the Bible tells me so. Let us hear the great hope and promise found in Jesus and go into the world, not singing a song of lament, but a hymn of praise, sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ; the Good News that the psalmist only imagined, but a Good News that we get to know and experience fully this day and in the days to come.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit - **Amen.**