

Sermon, *God is speaking, Patrick Heard It, So Can You*
The Rev. David J. Marshall, All Angels 3.17.24

On Wednesday this past week, my wife pulled up the Observer on her computer and clicked on the story about the Community Open House. She was surprised when the first picture was of me holding a bearded dragon named Spike. She said, “Hey, I recognize that mug.” If you’ve seen the picture, you’ll notice I’m wearing a white clerical collar, black shirt, and my All Angels name tag. It was in low 80s that day, and I was outside in the sun (and I was obviously hot), but it’s important for the shirt to be recognized (like a uniform). And, as you can see, I was blessing pets.

Yesterday we celebrated Elijah’s 14th birthday. He received some cards, three of which he recognized who they were by the handwriting of his name on the envelope – two of which are his grandmothers, Doris and Nancy. For the third card, he said, “Oh, this one is from Daphne Walker.” She has a particular handwriting style that I’d love to turn into a font. I’d call it the Daphne. It’s friendly and upbeat and clear. And, it’s distinctive; we could easily see it was from Daphne without even reading the inside of the card.

We recognize people by their faces, by their uniforms, by the voices and by their handwriting. Let me ask you this: do you recognize God’s handwriting? Do you see God’s face in your neighbors, friends and family? Do you see God acting in your family and in our community?

The prophet Jeremiah told us that God has a new covenant; it’s not written on stones (like the 10 Commandments) it is written on our hearts and minds. Do you recognize God’s handwriting on your heart and on your mind?

Jesus was in the Temple; he said for God to glorify his name and then there was a voice. They all heard it; some thought it was thunder, others thought it was an angel. Jesus said, “That voice is for you benefit, not mine.” Jesus knows God’s voice and handwriting. The sound that was made is for our benefit – in other words, God is speaking.

Some Christian faith traditions – mostly fundamentalist or evangelical – believe that God is no longer speaking. All that we need to know about God is in the Bible. If I may go so far as to say, that the Bible has stories that show God’s handwriting. The Anglican tradition agrees with them. Yes, the Bible is all that is necessary for salvation. You don’t need a separate vision, or extra-biblical understanding, or the Church or a priest, the Bible is all that is necessary. But, the Anglican tradition holds that God is still speaking – through the Sacraments, through the Church, through her clergy and leaders, in the stillness of worship, in the prayers of petition and thanksgiving; God is speaking.

Do you recognize God’s voice? Do you know God’s words written on your heart?

In seminary, we had a stream of consciousness exercise. Thankfully they let us use keyboards otherwise I'm sure I'd get a hand cramp. What we were told is to write down everything that pops up in our head. Everything. For hours. And then do it the next day and then the next. We then had to read it; but we read it with intention – to read God's voice. Speaking personally, I started to recognize God's words. They were thoughts outside of my thoughts – a metanoia if you will – that involved love, care for others, and words that gently led me out of my comfort zone. These were not things I think of myself – I had all of those to pour through. But, God was writing, is writing, on my heart and my mind. And, I believe that God's covenant is that God is writing on your heart and your mind too.

Today is the 5th Sunday of Lent and it is also St. Patrick's Day. Many in the congregation are wearing green. I had a professor say that a lot has been written about Patrick and some of it is actually true. What we know is that Patrick was a real person. His parents were landowners in Great Britton at the end of the 300s. When Patrick was 16 years old, some bandits from Ireland invaded his parent's property and sacked him – forcibly took him to Ireland – and forced him to work as a shepherd without pay. Six years later, he returned to Great Brittan and then returned to Ireland and died on March 17th in either 460 or 461. That we know. When he was an unpaid shepherd, he developed a deep sense of spirituality in nature. That practice remains with us to this day. According to what he wrote, in his sixth year as a shepherd (when he was 22 years old), he recognized God's voice within him. It told him to leave Ireland. He started walking and the Voice led him to a port where he boarded a ship and sailed home. Later on, in a dream, he had a vision of an angel speaking to him. It said that he must return to Ireland and bring the Faith with him.

I don't know about you, but if was captured and forced to work in a foreign land and then escaped, I would not want to return with a Gospel of love and forgiveness. But, God's handwriting on our heart is one of love, forgiveness and takes us from our comfort zone.

Patrick responded to the vision and entered the process and education of Holy Orders. 15 years later, and most likely a Bishop, he went to Ireland. It is said that "he brought Christianity to Ireland." He didn't, it was already there in a minor way, but, he converted many, many people. Let me ask you another question: who brought Christianity to you? Who was your Patrick? Although Christianity existed before you believed, the person that brought you to the faith can be seen as bringing Christianity to you; so, in that sense, for the people that Patrick converted, he did bring Christianity to Ireland.

The words that God had written on his heart and mind was to bring the Gospel of love, forgiveness and peace to the people of Ireland. He lived in poverty while he was there. Again, he came from a family of landowners. He was ordained in the Church in England (before there was the Church of England) and then probably became a Bishop which was most likely a comfortable position. Yet, he left it to return to the land that had stolen him. That story has God's handwriting all over it. Patrick lived into Jesus' words of loving and praying for our enemies. He saw the face

of God on the face of his captors. He forgave them and brought God's grace. This is why we celebrate St. Patrick's Day. And, if God spoke to Patrick, God is speaking to you.

Where do you see God acting in our community and in your family? What is God writing on your heart and your mind about love, forgiveness and peace. Who brought the Faith to you? Who are you a Patrick to – who have you brought love and peace to?

What does God's handwriting look like to you? What is God writing on your heart?

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.