

Sermon: Pentecost 2

The Rev. Mike Wernick

June 3, 2018

Year B

1 Samuel 3:1-10

Psalm 139:1-5, 12-17

2 Corinthians 4:5-12

Mark 2:23-3:6

About two hours from Albuquerque, New Mexico... out in the desert... and about fifty miles west of Socorro... on the Plains of San Agustin... is the VLA Radio Telescope... VLA stands for Very... Large... Array... the VLA is part of the National Radio Astronomy Observatories... it's one of the world's premier radio observatories... and it consists of 27 dish-shaped radio antennas... in a Y-shaped configuration... nine dishes along each axis...

Each individual antenna is 82 feet in diameter... and all the data that's collected from each antenna is electronically combined... so that... each individual antenna functions as though it is 422 feet in diameter... and together... all 27 antennas function as though they were one single antenna 22 miles across... and they listen...

If someone from another planet said "Hello" it would probably be picked up there pretty quickly... but mostly... officially... the dishes only listen to intergalactic noisemakers like black holes and pulsars... they listen for radio signals that contain information about the origins of the universe... and the VLA has detected things like... ice on Mercury... atmospheres around stars... it has discovered the first gravitational lens... micro-quasars in our own galaxy... and has disclosed that black holes form before the bulges in the centers of galaxies...

But still... the kinds of radio waves for which they listen... are billions of times fainter than man-made radio waves... and there can be so many sources of earth-based interference... that radio telescopes must be placed out in the middle of nowhere... where there is the least amount of interference... and where they can take advantage of the top-notch... high-end electronics that allow them to hone in more precisely... on just

those signals for which they want to listen... and radio astronomers are still learning to listen...

When I was a lot younger... much to my parent's chagrin... I often did my homework with the radio on... and after a few years of having an AM radio... I was able to buy an AM/FM transistor radio... the FM signal was more refined... it could carry more information... one station could carry two channels of information... so you could have stereo music... and listening to stereo music while I did my homework didn't seem to create any interference... didn't seem to affect my ability to concentrate... to stay focused... but as I've gotten older... I need more quiet... my brain doesn't like to deal with what it considers static... I'm more sensitive to the cacophony of competing sounds and thoughts...

And when I walk sometimes... in the quiet of the morning... I can hear the Spirit speaking to me more easily... and as Romans 8:26 says... that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words... that's why practices like Centering Prayer... or Buddhist meditation... or silent retreats... can help clear the mind... so we can hear the Spirit...

At first... Samuel thought it was Eli calling him... the Word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him... and so obediently... he got up and went to Eli... once... twice... and a third time... and it was then... that Eli realized what was happening... you see... Samuel was lying down with God... in the Temple of the Lord... where the Ark of the Covenant was... where the Throne of God was... and Samuel was still learning to listen...

And like Samuel... how many times... do we think that what we hear is one thing... when it's really something else... how many times... does what we bring to our listening: our pre-conceived notions... our prejudices... our baggage... make us hear a different message than what is transmitted... how many times... are we unable... or unwilling...

to hear that things have already changed... because it means that we will have to change too...

And so we hear about the disciples picking wheat on the Sabbath because they were hungry... and the Pharisees telling Jesus that what they were doing was unlawful... and Jesus doubles down... citing David's authority over the Bread of the Presence... and Leviticus describes this special bread... it was always on a Table in the Tabernacle... and later in the Temple... Ch. 24:5–7 say...

You shall take fine flour and bake twelve loaves from it... seven liters of flour shall be in each loaf... and you shall set them in two piles... six in a pile... on a table of pure gold before the Lord... and you shall put pure frankincense on each pile... that it may go with the bread as a memorial portion... as a food offering to the Lord...

One commentary on this passage says... *The bread is not eaten by the diety... it is given to the priests as remuneration for their ritual service... but it must be eaten in the sanctuary complex because of its absorption of holiness by close and prolonged proximity to the diety...*

But as described in 1 Samuel 21... David and his men were hungry... so he asked Ahimelech for five loaves of this bread... and they ate... and by affirming what they did... Jesus affirmed that the Sabbath was made for humankind... and not humankind for the Sabbath... Jesus' focus was on Grace... but the Pharisees' focus was on Law... he hoped they could hear him... but they must have had the Very Small Array... of dish-shaped antennas... and they could not... and then Jesus went and healed on the Sabbath... again... so the Pharisees and the Herodians... conspired... which means... *breathed together*... about how they could destroy him...

Fr. Mike Hinman wrote... when the Pharisees and Jesus disagreed on a point of belief... whether it was lawful to heal on the Sabbath... it's important to notice the two

parts of Jesus' response... first... Mark's Gospel says he was angry and grieved at the Pharisees and their hardness of heart... and when we see injustice... when we see lack of concern for those in need... those feelings of anger and grief are natural... and even holy...

But the second piece is just as important... Jesus didn't lash out against those he was angry with... instead he reached out in love and healing to those in need... instead of creating more wounds... Jesus responded in the love that was lacking in the Pharisees... and there are so many reasons for us to be rightly angry and grieved today about how people are treated... and it is so easy for us to be consumed by our anger and act out of it... but we can... let ourselves feel that... and yet commit ourselves to one small act of love that can be our response...

Thomas Long concludes... that Jesus wasn't crucified for his views of the Sabbath... or of the Synagogue and Temple... and it wasn't because he stirred up political revolution... he was killed because he did God's will... and that was truly revolutionary... every deed he performed was an expression of God's will... and that meant that the will of others was confronted... everything he said was a pronouncement of God's reign... and that meant the toppling of lesser... though tightly held kingdoms... and people who do God's will... run afoul of all who are invested in another will... their own... and that of nationalistic fervor... racial bigotry... or greed...

We need to learn to listen past the Law... it took a while for Episcopalians to hear that having slaves was not OK... it took a while for Lutherans to hear that Martin Luther's anti-Judaism was not OK... it took a while for America to pass the 19th Amendment and recognize a woman's right to vote... it took the Voting Rights Act of 1965... to help African-Americans overcome the legal barriers that kept them from exercising their right to vote... as guaranteed in the 15th Amendment... though that's still an issue... and while it may have taken less time for marriage equality to be recognized... we still have

ears that will not hear... when it comes to common sense gun control... comprehensive immigration reform... and access to health care...

There are some things that don't change... like God's love... forgiveness... and redemption... there are some things that don't change... like the highest form of democratization... experienced on Pentecost... but there are other things that must change in response to how collectively... we listen to God whispering to us... and when we create Sabbath space... when we create spaces of silence... when we allow silence to be... to express itself... when we stop being distracted by the interference caused by those things which are not essential to our faith... or by the letter of the Law... we will we will finally be able to listen to God with an antenna that is more than 22 miles across... and we will not only hear God's sighs that are too deep for words... but we will respond to them... in love... as Jesus did...

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