

18th October 2021

Speak

“Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.”

Bible, 1 Samuel 3:9

When young Samuel hears a voice in the temple calling his name, he awakens his mentor, Eli, the old prophet, and asks, “Why did you call me?” Eli insists he didn’t. But the voice persists, and Eli realises what’s happening. “It’s not me, calling,” he tells Samuel. “When the voice comes again, say, ‘Speak Lord, for your servant is listening.’” Samuel does exactly that, and a life in service of his God begins. The voice of God? The call of the Lord? As easy as that? I wonder ...

The first line of one of the hymns written in the 19th century by Frances Ridley Havergal is “Lord, speak to me, that I may speak, in living echoes of thy tone.” In the stanzas that follow, Havergal’s prayer asks God to lead, strengthen, teach, fill and use. But it begins with “speak”. A desire to hear the voice of God comes first. But how do *we* discern God’s voice?

My mother’s approach was: “Open your Bible at random, and God will speak through the first verse your eye falls on.” I was sceptical. It sounded like the equivalent of throwing a pack of cards in the air and basing your life on the nine of clubs because it happened to fall on your shoe, or interpreting God’s voice through the entrails of a chicken, patterns in a jumble of bones, or tea-leaves in a cup. My mum’s way was her way, and she knew God was speaking to her. But it wasn’t my way.

So how *does* God speak to me? God speaks through my relationship with “the other”, developed in silences, worship, prayers, walks, writing, reading, scripture, awareness and a host of other things. From time to time it’s a sense of “a prompting”. The “random verse” method doesn’t do it for me. I’ve to work at it, talk about it, think about it, look to develop it and see what comes of it. If the promptings become stronger, I follow them further. And, when I think about it, I suspect my mum had to do that too.

The voice of God? It’s God and me working things out together. I say with Samuel – and my mum – “Speak Lord, for your servant is listening.” I wait, and listen some more. Then I pray with Frances Ridley Havergal that can I begin to speak “in living echoes” of the voice I’ve heard.

A prayer for today

“As you have sought, so let me seek ...” your will and your way. Amen

Frances Ridley Havergal