

“The Voice of Love”

Philippians 4:8-9; John 15:9-17; Psalm 98; 1John 5:1-9

May 13, 2012

Pastor James York

A comedian tells of how the voice of his mother echoes in his head.

- My mother taught me to appreciate a job well done: "If you're going to make a mess, do it outside; I just finished cleaning."
- My mother taught me religion: "You better pray that will come out of the carpet."
- My mother taught me logic: "Because I said so, that's why."
- My mother taught me contortionism: "Will you look at the dirt on the back of your neck!"
- My mother taught me stamina: "You'll sit there 'til all your homework is finished."
- My mother taught me about weather: "It looks as if a tornado swept through your room."
- My mother taught me about genetics: "You're just like your father."
- My mother taught me wisdom: "When you get to be my age, you'll understand."

Hopefully you have a loving mother and can still hear her voice in your head, affirming you, guiding you, loving you and building you up more and more into the likeness of Jesus.

Sports psychologist Julie Bell has found that those who excel in their sport tend to nurture and listen to a coaching voice in their head. The coaching voice keeps them focused, keeps instructing them on proper technique and keeps encouraging them. Without a strong inner coaching voice one easily gets distracted by the crowd, aches and pains, a missed call, an unfavorable bounce or even a mistake they just made which could be leading them into a downward spiral of poorer and poorer performance.

Bell says we have to be intentional regarding which voice in our head we let guide our thoughts, which guides our actions. Bell is a Christian and says, "In order to put my best out there, I have to make my thoughts obedient to Christ, to maximize every occasion for Christ." The Apostle Paul puts it this way **Philippians 4:8-9** "Summing it all up, friends, I'd say you will do best by filling your minds and meditating on things true, noble, reputable, authentic, compelling, gracious—the best, not the worst; the beautiful, not the ugly; things to praise, not things to curse. Put into practice what you learned from me, what you heard and saw and realized. Do that, and God who makes everything work together, will work you into God's most excellent harmonies."

Our greatest coach is Jesus who is saying to us. **John 15:9-17** "I have loved you even as the Father has loved me. Remain in my love. When you obey my commandments, you remain in my love, just as I obey my Father's commandments and remain in God's love. I have told you these things so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow! This is my commandment: Love each other in the same way I have loved you. There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you slaves, because a master doesn't confide in his slaves. Now you are my friends, since I

have told you everything the Father told me. You didn't choose me. I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce lasting fruit, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask for, using my name. This is my command: Love each other.”

Jesus proclaims love and shows love for all of us. Since Jesus loves us, wants the very best for us, desires for us to be joyful; Jesus commands us to love. Receiving love and sharing love brings out the beauty in us, those around us and creation. Great mothers, coaches and mentors embody God's love and constantly reveal Jesus' love in word and action.

The psalmist sings. **Psalm 98 “Sing to God a brand-new song. God's made a world of wonders! God rolled up God's sleeves, God set things right. God made history with salvation, God showed the world what God could do. God remembered to love us, a bonus to God's dear family, Israel—indefatigable love. The whole earth comes to attention. Look—God's work of salvation! Shout your praises to God, everybody! Let loose and sing! Strike up the band! Round up an orchestra to play for God, Add on a hundred-voice choir. Feature trumpets and big trombones, Fill the air with praises to King God. Let the sea and its fish give a round of applause, With everything living on earth joining in. Let ocean breakers call out, "Encore!" And mountains harmonize the finale— A tribute to God when God comes, When God comes to set the earth right. God will straighten out the whole world, God will put the world right, and everyone in it.**

The psalmist burst forth in joyful song because the psalmist listened to the voice of God proclaiming God's love for them. The psalmist remembers the wonders that revealed God's love.

We often hear God's voice through mothers, fathers, teachers, coaches, friends and others who love us, encourage us and sacrifice for us. I invite you to remember people who have loved you in these 2 minutes of silence.

Amen. Hopefully you remembered many people who love you. Hopefully you can hear their voices inspiring you to love. Keep recalling and listening to these voices, follow them into a growing spiral of deeper love.

The early church had an exceptional coach in John who said. **1 John 5:1-9 “Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has become a child of God. And everyone who loves the Father loves God's children, too. We know we love God's children if we love God and obey God's commandments. Loving God means keeping God's commandments, and God's commandments are not burdensome. For every child of God defeats this evil world, and we achieve this victory through our faith. And who can win this battle against the world? Only those who believe that Jesus is the Son of God. And Jesus Christ was revealed as God's Son by his baptism in water and by shedding his blood on the cross-- not by water only, but by water and blood. And the Spirit, who is truth, confirms it with the Spirit's testimony. So we have these three witnesses-- the Spirit, the water, and the blood-- and all three agree. Since we believe human testimony, surely we can believe the greater testimony that comes from God. And God has testified about God's Son.**

We have an inner voice, the Holy Spirit, who speaks love and truth to us. Listening to the Holy Spirit will enable us to overcome every form of evil and every form of hate with love.

This true story of a forgiving, loving mother, reveals a lady who excelled in listening to God's voice of love and in turn, she was able to love. Blocking out all the voices for justice and revenge, she

listens to the inner voice in her head of the Holy Spirit. She receives God's grace and love and is gracious. The scene is a courtroom trial in South Africa. A frail black mother, over 70 years old, gets slowly to her feet. Facing her, are several white security police officers. One of them, a Mr. Van Der Broek, has just been tried and found guilty in the murders of the woman's son and husband. He had come to the woman's home, taken her son, shot him at point-blank range, and burned his body while he and his officers partied nearby. Several years later, Van Der Broek and his cohorts returned for her husband as well. For months she heard nothing of his whereabouts. Then, almost two years after her husband's disappearance, Van Der Broek came back to fetch her. How vividly she remembered that night. They took her to a riverbank where she saw her husband, bound and beaten, but still strong in spirit, lying on a pile of wood. The last words she heard from his lips as Van Der Broek and his fellow officers poured gasoline over his body and set him on fire were, "Father, forgive them ... " When the woman stood in the courtroom and listened to the confessions of Van Der Broek, a member of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission turned to her and said, "So what do you want? How should justice be done to this man who has so brutally destroyed your family?" "I want three things," said the lady calmly and confidently. "I want first to be taken to the place where my husband's body was burned to gather up the dust and give his remains a decent burial." She paused, then continued, "My husband and son were my only family. So I want Mr. Van Der Broek to become my son. I want him to come twice a month to my house and spend the day with me so I can pour out on him whatever love I have remaining in me." "Finally," she said, "I would like Mr. Van Der Broek to know that I offer him my forgiveness because Jesus Christ died to forgive. This was also the wish of my husband. So, I would kindly ask someone to come to my side and lead me across the courtroom so that I can take Mr. Van Der Broek in my arms, embrace him and let him know that he is truly forgiven." As the court assistants came to lead the woman across the room, Van Der Broek fainted, overwhelmed by what he had heard. As he struggled for consciousness, those in the courtroom—family, friends, neighbors, all victims of decades of oppression and injustice—began to sing softly and assuredly, "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me."

How was that lady able to be so loving and gracious? Perhaps her love grew by her showing love in the little things first.

Someone cuts you off in traffic. Which voice do you listen to? The one that says get revenge or the one that says bless them, I hope they arrive at their destination safely. I am thankful that I have a car, can drive, yield to another and reveal God's love by my courtesy.

A referee misses a call that goes against your team. Do you listen to the voice that says get angry, scream and pout? Or do you listen to the voice that is thankful that you can play, or watch a sport and reveal God's love by your sportsmanship?

A co-worker dumps a load of work on you so they can go on vacation. Do you listen to the voice that says seethe and dump even more work on them when they return? Or do you listen to the voice that says you are blessed to have a job, blessed to be able to complete this work and be genuinely happy that your coworker is enjoying vacation?

A student steals your idea. Do you listen to the voice that says get justice or to the voice that says you are gifted, creative and will come up with another great idea?

You are working on a home improvement project where unforeseen obstacles are slowing you down and increasing the costs. Do you listen to the voice that says get angry and impatient or do you listen to the voice that says be thankful for your home, you are creative and these challenges will bring out your best making your home even more beautiful?

A friend wrongs you. Do you listen to the voice that invites you to dwell on that wrong and grow it with misconceptions, or do you shift your focus complimenting them on something you enjoy about them which deepens your love for them?

We are able to love in big ways because we have learned to love in lots of little ways. We are able to hear God's voice in crisis because we listen to God every day.

C. S. Lewis explains that loving is often hard because we often try to listen to multiple voices, God's voice, the culture's voice and our selfish voice. C. S. Lewis writes "The terrible thing, the almost impossible thing, is to hand over your whole self—all your wishes and precautions—to Christ. But it is far easier than what we are all trying to do instead. For what we are trying to do is to remain what we call "ourselves," to keep personal happiness as our great aim in life, and yet at the same time to be "good." We are all trying to let our mind and heart go their own way—centered on money or pleasure or ambition—and hoping, in spite of this, to behave honestly and chastely and humbly. And that is exactly what Christ warned us you could not do. As Jesus said, a thistle cannot produce figs. If I am a field that contains nothing but grass seed, I cannot produce wheat. Cutting the grass may keep it short: but I shall still produce grass and no wheat. If I want to produce wheat, the change must go deeper than the surface. I must be ploughed up and re-sown. Do not waste time bothering whether you "love" your neighbor; act as if you did. As soon as we do this we find one of the great secrets. When you are behaving as if you loved someone, you will presently come to love them. If you injure someone you dislike, you will find yourself disliking them more. If you do them a good turn, you will find yourself disliking them less."

Carol Cook says, "If God has told us once, God has told us a thousand times. The answer is love. Not tolerance. Not patience. Not kindness. Not being nice. The answer is love—passionate dancing with our arms wide open love for everyone and everything God has made. The answer is love."

Listen to God's voice of love, and then, love. Amen