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Hearing Voices

Minister King Duncan asks an interesting question in one of his writings. He asks if we recognize the name of Elwood Edwards. Do you know him? You may not think so, but you probably have heard his voice hundreds of times. In fact, twenty-seven million times every day he speaks to people, saying things like, "Welcome!"; "File's done"; "Good-bye"; and "You've got mail!" So who is Elwood Edwards? His is the voice recorded and played by AOL to accompany certain email commands and responses. We know Elwood's voice, though we've never met him and know nothing about him.

Most of us would probably be able to recognize Elwood Edwards' voice more readily than we would the voice of God. Yet God's voice is mentioned over and over again in scripture. The psalmist says God's voice flashes flame and shakes the wilderness. The prophet Elijah listens for God's voice and eventually hears it. Saul heard the voice on the road to Damascus. Jesus heard the voice at his baptism in the Jordan River. Has God ever spoken to you?

We need to be careful in answering that question, of course, because hearing voices that others don't hear can be a symptom that something is seriously amiss with us! At best, we may not be believed if we think we've heard from God. At worst, we might be thought to be crazy.

Maybe that's why most of us don't claim to hear God's voice. But if you're anything like us, we'd like to get a word now and then. We'd like a periodic report on how we're doing, on why certain events have occurred or failed to occur, or on what the future may hold. Why is God silent on these matters? We want God to speak!

But then again, the Biblical testimony from those who've heard from God is pretty dramatic. God doesn't speak frivolously. God's voice always seems to demand something big from the hearer. Saul changed his whole life when he heard God. Elijah recommitted to his call as prophet. Samuel set forth on a new career. Jesus began a ministry. You see, the voice of God asks something of us, whether it is action, change of heart, forgiveness, or hope. We're usually meant to respond when God speaks. And what is asked may not be easy, but it's always for good.

And old minister tells the story of ushering a distraught young woman into his office who wanted to hear from God. Why hadn't God spoken to her, though she prayed day in and day out for help? The old minister sat and listened to this young woman and then very softly whispered a reply. "I can't hear you!" she called to him and took a step closer. The old minister again whispered a reply and again she said, "I still couldn't hear what you said!" and she stepped a little closer. Again he whispered. Again she complained that she couldn't hear and moved closer. Finally, standing very near the old minister, she heard him say, "Sometimes God whispers, so that we will move closer to hear him."

Have you heard the voice of God? It can come as a shout of rebuke, or a whisper of welcome support and tender love. We hope you're listening. We hope you'll be prepared to step a little closer to pick up the message. You wouldn't want to miss a word!