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During one summer-break, I developed new appreciation for the elegance of a special type of bird. The majesty of the wingspans of these creatures completely awed me. Now, you may think that I am talking of that handsome bird, the Bald Eagle. Or perhaps I had the opportunity to view in flight the Condors of the American West. Or maybe I observed the incredible dignity of a snowy white owl ghosting gracefully through the hardwoods. But no, the bird I'm talking about here which so mesmerized me with its elegance, and dignity, and majesty was actually... the Buzzard. Yes, I know. These animals survive by eating rotting road kill. Their colonies can really stink if you get down-wind of them. And buzzards protect their nests through the disgusting mechanism of actually throwing up on you if you get too close. But one morning that summer, on a pier along the

Inland Coastal waterway, I was left absolutely speechless at the silent, reverent tableau these birds created.

Just past sunrise on a cloudless July morning in South Georgia, I drove to the public boat dock which would be my fishing spot for that day. As the dawn struck the waters of the Crooked River on the Cumberland Sound, each of the 13 pillars of my boat dock was topped by a buzzard. These huge birds had their pinions open and were facing the rising sun to catch its warming rays against the full extension of their grey wingspans. It was like that scene from *City of Angels*, where all God's angelic messengers gathered to welcome the sunrise on a new day in God's earth. But instead of Nicolas Cage and Meg Ryan to greet the dawn, I had buzzards! ☺ And, not a sound could be heard in that breathless Georgia morning as these creatures stood statue-still on top of their posts with their wings open, silently receiving the first warming blessing of the new day. It was an intensely reverent, precious moment. These birds seemed to be joyfully worshiping their creator in syllables my own human senses could not hear. I didn't have the right language.

In *Hebrews* today, we hear of the failure of Israel to obey God at the Mount Zion of the Old Testament. In *Exodus* 19, God descends on Mount Sinai to meet his people. But the voice of God is so terrifying, the Children of Israel cannot even hope to set foot on the mountain and live. (See Ex.19:16-22) There is **that** great a difference which divides The Lord from mortal man, and mankind cannot stand to be in the glory of His presence. Man could not withstand the power of God's words on that Mount Zion of the Old Testament; we didn't have the language to even begin to understand the words of the Creator God. But, in *Hebrews* today, we receive the image of the new Mount Zion, no longer an earthly mountain but a heavenly one. And this new Mount Zion is, if anything, even more imposing than the first Mount Zion of *Exodus*. For in this new mountain home, there is the New Jerusalem filled with innumerable angels, countless saints, a host of the redeemed, the Lord God, and Jesus Christ himself. (See *Heb.12:22-24*) And we are expected to listen to God, to receive his blessings, to offer him acceptable worship. We are, in short to live together with God forever, in communion with the Lord. We children of God are, it seems to use a new language to worship and adore the Lord of all.

In the beginning of *Jeremiah*, the Prophet understands the futility of earthly efforts. Jeremiah laments over his inadequacies, describing himself as nothing but a boy, surely unfit and incapable of performing the mission God is laying upon him. For Jeremiah, it is necessary for The Lord to touch his prophet's mouth in order to equip him for his destiny. God must put His words into Jeremiah's mouth (see Jer.1:6-9). You see, God had to give his prophet a new language in order to be a truly faithful witness to the Lord's love and mercy for His people. Because the language of true love and infinite mercy is the language of God.

The Apostle Paul understood the inadequacies of earthly language in speaking about heavenly things. He tells the early Church in Rome, "...the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groaning too deep for words." (Rom.8:26) In an intimate relationship with the Holy Spirit, there is born in the life of the Redeemed a new kind of language, a heavenly tongue often expressed through wells of deep emotion beyond the telling of human words.

This then is the language of God, the language of His love and mercy. Human words pale to near nothing, and we cannot hope to express the depth of love and mercy which God feels, and which God yearns for us to feel for Him and for one another. A foretaste of this heavenly language was apparent in a recent Daily Office reading about the tongues of fire descending upon the Apostles in Acts 2. People from the world over could hear in their own languages Peter and his friends talking about Jesus. This was very much a reversal of the division and confusion brought about in the original curse of Babel (See Acts 2:1-11; Gen.11:1-9) So, while the words of man frequently confuse and divide, God's language invariably instructs and unites.

It is this new language, the language of God's love and mercy that the Temple priest lacks in Luke 13. He is so focused on God's law, so obsessed with getting the rituals of worship right, that he can no longer hear the pleadings of pain coming from those of God's children to whom he is supposed to minister and care for. (See Lk.13:10-14) The woman cured of this 18-year-long torment immediately glorified God. (See Lk.13:13) But this priest has become so distracted by the rote motions of his job, so enthralled with the trappings of his ministry that he can only rail about the conventions which have been broken on that Sabbath Day. He has so lost the ability to communicate in God's language of love and mercy, he can't bring himself to rejoice that this poor woman who was so tortured by her deformity for 18 years has been miraculously, gloriously healed. This priest is so enslaved to the conventional requirements of his duty, that he does not even realize he has just witnessed a healing miracle of God. God has come into his presence, and this hypocrite who is **supposed** to be God's servant, this man can't even see his Lord standing right there in front of him, so blinded is he by the determination to get all the appropriate boxes checked off on his task list.

I wonder, are we ever like that? Do we become so fixated with getting things done that we miss the presence of Our Lord in the people and the needs that cross our paths? Have we too become deaf to the language of the Holy Spirit when He calls out to us to witness to His love and grace?

Jeremiah hears God's instructions for him in heaven's tongue, and God's commissioning of His prophet applies to you and me as well. This commissioning happens in the life of a Christian when a few things finally come into focus. Just like God's statement to Jeremiah that, "...before you were born I consecrated you," (v. 1:5) to truly be God's servant, you have to come to the realization that He had planned a glorious and specific role for you as His child before you were even conceived. And the Psalmist is very clear this morning that not only was God guiding your life from the instant of your birth (See Ps.71:6), but this plan for your mission in His kingdom extends forever, far beyond this worldly existence. (See Ps.71:17-18,24)

Next, we must, just like Jeremiah learn humility, and come to know the real frailty and weakness of our own human condition (See Jer.1:6); and these are lessons which are usually the fruits of some pretty painful experiences in this life. It is from exactly this kind of pain, when we come to understand our own weakness, that we can begin to learn the infinite strength of God, and his promise of "I am with you always and will deliver you." (See Mt.28:20; Jer.1.8) And then, just like Jeremiah, The Lord can begin to use you, and put His Word into you, and use you gloriously, once you can hear and speak with the language of His Kingdom.

So, let me ask you this morning, have you come to the New Mount Zion? Have you heard – **really heard** the language of God's love and mercy from the one who birthed love and created mercy? Have you come to that close relationship with the third person of God? Are you walking each day with the presence of the Holy Spirit in your life, the one who speaks to you in the quiet voice of instruction, discernment, and comfort? Have you come to know the Holy Spirit who calls you to Him and directs your steps with that clear resonance of Godly truth?

Because that is my prayer for all of you this morning, that you may come to stand on the mountain of God, and be enfolded by the Holy Spirit in His wonder, and His grace. And then, only then will you truly hear and speak the language of His love and mercy.

In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, Amen. JWB+ 07-29-16