

“The Voice of the Turtledove”

September 25<sup>th</sup>, 2016  
19<sup>th</sup> Sun./Pentecost  
American Indian Ministry

Song of Songs 2:1-17

Luke 16:19-31

*The flowers appear on the earth, the time of singing has come,  
and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land.*

*Song of Songs 2:12*

Let us pray... O God,

Thank you for the ways in which you are still speaking to us in this time and place.

May we be listening well enough to hear the voices of those  
who are not usually heard.

Amen

The King James Version of the Song of Songs 2:12 is:

*The flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come,  
and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land.*

It obviously makes more sense in the Revised Standard Version to say:

*...the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land.*

The Common English Version puts it this way:

*...The cooing of doves is heard in our land –*

which uses the imagery of ‘dove’ to imply that a time of peace has come.

Still, I like the King James Version with ‘*the voice of the turtle*’ –

as if to say that even if turtles had a voice, they could be heard.

I looked up this passage on the internet to see if there

was some explanation why ‘turtle’ was used in this older translation.

One reference says that the word in Hebrew literally means ‘turtle’,

but that the word itself sounds like a bird’s call,

so modern English translators presumed this association  
could mean ‘turtle-dove’.

<http://www.kjvtoday.com/home/turtle-or-turtledove-in-song-of-solomon-212-et-al>

Another posting said this Hebrew word originally referred

to a more general kind of ‘creeping thing’, like a turtle – or a frog.

If you have ever heard choruses of baby frogs or “peepers” in a rural place,

then you know it is spring-time.

That works in making sense of the first part of the verse that it is spring and

*...the time of singing has come...*

Then there was a comment from someone who said they had grown up on a farm  
and that turtles do have a voice – when they mate!

Well right there, that is consistent with the Song of Songs’ overall theme of love  
and you could add peace and hope for the future.

Willard, p.2

This person said that turtles... 'do have a voice

and it is one of the earliest sounds we hear in the spring

so the passage doesn't need to be made into a bird cooing.

On the contrary, doves spend the whole winter here. They coo all the time.

That's not a "sign of spring" but hearing the voice of the turtle is.

Let God be true!

I believe the King James translators knew what they were doing

and got it right.'

<http://hermeneutics.stackexchange.com/questions/1504/why-does-the-king-james-have-turtle-in-song-of-solomon-212>

*and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land...*

There's a lot of voices out there in our land right now

and not many of them are hopeful or loving or peaceful.

We have to really listen hard and concentrate to hear

'the voice of the turtle' – and the voice of truth.

It is hard to avoid the irony and political satire of this election...

The same could be said about one interpretation of Jesus' parable

from our Gospel lesson today about Lazarus and the rich man –

who is traditionally called Dives, which is a Latin word for 'rich man'.

Details of this story point toward the Sadducees who were

the priestly powers in charge of the Temple of Jerusalem in Jesus' day.

Now, the Sadducees did not believe in an afterlife for one thing –

which-is-why-they-were *sad, you-see...*

The main reason this parable is a political swipe at the Sadducees is that

Jesus provides a vision of the life beyond hereafter with some vivid details.

More clues link the Sadducees with Dives:

For one thing, as priests and leaders in the community,

the Sadducees would have worn expensive clothes –

like Dives whom Jesus describes as wearing 'purple and fine linen'.

Another clue is that Dives asks that Lazarus be sent to warn his five brothers

about the fate that awaits them if they don't change their ways.

According to the First Century CE historian, Josephus,

the High Priest Caiaphas also had five brothers

who held positions of authority in the Temple.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rich\\_man\\_and\\_Lazarus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rich_man_and_Lazarus)

This last detail heightens the irony in Jesus' parable

as Dives is roasting in his own ignorance, clueless as he still thinks

he can order Lazarus around to fetch water or act as a messenger.

His heart is so hardened, he can't even see the neglect he brought upon himself.

Willard, p.3

He couldn't hear that 'still, small voice' of God –

that voice that spoke to the Prophet Elijah in his despair as he hid  
from the tempest, earthquake, and fire,  
that voice that said, "What are you doing here, Eli'jah?"

When he was alive, Dives couldn't hear that 'still, small voice' of God

that seeks us out, providing grace like a rest area along a long and weary road,  
or guidance like a brick wall to block our path  
when we are going the wrong way.

Dives ignored the GPS of how God was speaking to him through the needs  
of people like Lazarus, who were having a hard time finding their way.

Yet it was Lazarus who was cradled in the care of Abraham  
the 'Father of Multitudes' and the great friend of God,

So, what do we know about him?

How is he an example for us?

For one thing, the name Lazarus is the Latin form of the name, "Eleazar",  
which means, "God has helped".

In this story from the Gospel of Luke, Lazarus is a character in a story  
who was a poor person, suffering from sores on his body  
and who begged at the gate of this rich man  
who knew him by name, but did nothing to help.

In the Gospel of John, Lazarus was a person who was a friend of Jesus  
and the brother of Martha and Mary of Bethany.

In the 11<sup>th</sup> chapter of John 11,

Jesus raised Lazarus from death after four days in a tomb,  
and in the 12<sup>th</sup> chapter, the priests of Jerusalem – or the Sadducees,  
conspire to kill Lazarus along with Jesus.

Maybe Lazarus was just somebody who listened and allowed God to help  
despite the circumstances.

In Psalm 46, it is written:

<sup>1</sup>God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

<sup>2</sup>Therefore we will not fear though the earth should change,  
though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea;

<sup>3</sup>though its waters roar and foam,

though the mountains tremble with its tumult. *Selah*

<sup>4</sup>There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,  
the holy habitation of the Most High.

<sup>5</sup>God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved;  
God will help her right early.

Willard, p.4

<sup>6</sup> The nations rage, the kingdoms totter;

[God] utters [God's] voice, the earth melts.

<sup>7</sup> The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. *Selah*

<sup>8</sup> Come, behold the works of the LORD,

how [God] has [brought about] desolations in the earth.

<sup>9</sup> [God] makes wars cease to the end of the earth;

...breaks the bow, and shatters the spear,

...burns the chariots with fire!

[God says to us,]

<sup>10</sup> "Be still, and know that I am God.

I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted in the earth!"

<sup>11</sup> The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. *Selah*

These words still have something to say to us in our time  
regardless of the outward circumstances.

The crises change, but the obligation to be a people of hope  
in the midst of it all remains.

As people of faith,

we must continue to listen for that 'still, small voice' of God,

especially as it is echoed in the voice of 'the least of these' –

the minority in our midst.

Then truly, we will be ready for that time of rebirth

when 'The flowers [reappear] on the earth, the time of singing [returns],

[when even] the voice of [a turtle can be] heard in our land...

Amen

*Our first scripture lesson today is from the Song of Songs 2:1-17;  
And it describes the love of God in terms of romantic love.  
However, it also just celebrates this kind of love between two people  
as natural and good...*

Jeanie:

I am a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys.

Jan:

<sup>2</sup> As a lily among brambles, so is my love among maidens.

Jeanie:

<sup>3</sup> As an apple tree among the trees of the wood,  
so is my beloved among young men.

With great delight I sat in his shadow,  
and his fruit was sweet to my taste,

<sup>4</sup> He brought me to the banqueting house,  
and his banner over me was love.

<sup>5</sup> Sustain me with raisins, refresh me with apples;  
for I am sick with love.

<sup>6</sup> O that his left hand were under my head,  
and that his right hand embraced me!

Jan:

<sup>7</sup> I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem,  
by the gazelles or the hinds of the field,  
that you stir not up nor awaken love until it please.

Jeanie:

<sup>8</sup> The voice of my beloved! Behold, he comes,  
leaping upon the mountains, bounding over the hills.

<sup>9</sup> My beloved is like a gazelle, or a young stag.  
Behold, there he stands behind our wall,  
gazing in at the windows, looking through the lattice.

<sup>10</sup> My beloved speaks and says to me:

Jan:

- “Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away;  
    <sup>11</sup> for lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone.  
<sup>12</sup> The flowers appear on the earth, the time of singing has come,  
    and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land.  
<sup>13</sup> The fig tree puts forth its figs, and the vines are in blossom;  
    they give forth fragrance.  
    Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away.  
<sup>14</sup> O my dove, in the clefts of the rock, in the covert of the cliff,  
    let me see your face, let me hear your voice,  
    for your voice is sweet, and your face is comely.  
<sup>15</sup> Catch us the foxes, the little foxes,  
    that spoil the vineyards, for our vineyards are in blossom.”

Jeanie:

- <sup>16</sup> My beloved is mine and I am his,  
    he pastures his flock among the lilies.  
<sup>17</sup> Until the day breathe and the shadows flee,  
    turn, my beloved, be like a gazelle,  
    or a young stag upon rugged mountains.

*Let us be challenged and guided by these words...*

*Luke 16:19-31*

[Jesus said,]

<sup>19</sup> “There was a rich man, who was clothed in purple and fine linen  
and who feasted sumptuously every day.

<sup>20</sup> And at his gate lay a poor man named Laz’arus, full of sores,  
<sup>21</sup> who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man’s table;  
moreover the dogs came and licked his sores.

<sup>22</sup> The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s bosom.  
The rich man also died and was buried;

<sup>23</sup> and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes, and saw Abraham far off  
and Laz’arus in his bosom.

<sup>24</sup> And he called out,  
‘Father Abraham, have mercy upon me,  
and send Laz’arus to dip the end of his finger in water  
and cool my tongue; for I am in anguish in this flame.’

<sup>25</sup> But Abraham said,  
‘Son, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things,  
and Laz’arus in like manner evil things;  
but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish.

<sup>26</sup> And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed,  
in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able,  
and none may cross from there to us.’

<sup>27</sup> And [Lazarus] said, ‘Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father’s house,  
<sup>28</sup> for I have five brothers, so that he may warn them,  
lest they also come into this place of torment.’

<sup>29</sup> But Abraham said,  
‘They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.’

<sup>30</sup> And he said,  
‘No, father Abraham; but if some one goes to them from the dead,  
they will repent.’

<sup>31</sup> He said to him,  
‘If they do not hear Moses and the prophets,  
neither will they be convinced if some one should rise from the dead.’”

1 Kings 19:11-13

<sup>11</sup> And he said, "Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the LORD." And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and broke in pieces the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake; <sup>12</sup> and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice. <sup>13</sup> And when Eli'jah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. And behold, there came a voice to him, and said, "What are you doing here, Eli'jah?"

*Psalm 146*

<sup>1</sup> Shout praises to the LORD! With all that I am, I will shout his praises.

<sup>2</sup> I will sing and praise the LORD God for as long as I live.

<sup>3</sup> You can't depend on anyone, not even a great leader.

<sup>4</sup> Once they die and are buried, that will be the end of all their plans.

<sup>5</sup> The LORD God of Jacob blesses everyone who trusts him and depends on him.

<sup>6</sup> God made heaven and earth; he created the sea and everything else. God always keeps his word.

<sup>7</sup> He gives justice to the poor and food to the hungry. The LORD sets prisoners free

<sup>8</sup> and heals blind eyes. He gives a helping hand to everyone who falls. The LORD loves good people

<sup>9</sup> and looks after strangers. He defends the rights of orphans and widows, but destroys the wicked.

<sup>10</sup> The LORD God of Zion will rule forever! Shout praises to the LORD!

*I see it has been a while since this subject was discussed. I believe the argument can be made that by the use of the original word, it would be possible that it actually means, "turtle". We try to explain it away with using the word "turtle dove" which of course makes sense. The explanation has also been made that "turtle" would be synonymous with our modern word, "turtle dove". The trouble being, that all the explanations always lead back to translating the word as a dove. May I ask a question? Why can we not leave it as turtle? An argument above has been made for that. Is there a reason that we want it to say dove instead of turtle?? It would appear to me that most people today are so far removed from rural life that they do not have a clue. It makes perfect sense that the KJV translators put turtle there and I think they knew what they were doing. You see, I've lived my entire life on a farm. In the spring of the year, when the weather warms up one of the first things that happens is the frogs start to sing. Now most people hear the sounds of the "peepers" and don't give it a thought. However, not all the croaking or peeping is made by frogs. Turtles have a voice. They only use it when mating but they do have a voice and it is one of the earliest sounds we hear in the spring so the passage doesn't need to be made into a bird cooing. On the contrary, doves spend the whole winter here. They coo all the time. That's not a "sign of spring" but hearing the voice of the turtle is. Let God be true! I believe the King James translators knew what they were doing and got it right. <http://hermeneutics.stackexchange.com/questions/1504/why-does-the-king-james-have-turtle-in-song-of-solomon-212>*