

## "To Know We Are Known"

What have you heard from God so far this morning? Or, before we ask that question, maybe the first question is, do you hear God at all, and not just today, any day? Hearing the message God wants us to hear cuts to the center of the relevancy and vitality of our faith. And so, as we think about what God is saying to us or our ability to hear what God is saying, let's consider two types of audio technology that impact what we hear. The first of these is referred to as "white noise." Are you familiar with this term? It works like this and I'm using our sleeping habits as an example. Some folks have a bedtime routine that involves white noise technology. They fluff up their pillows, settle into the bed, pull up the covers and then, before turning off the light, they turn on their "white noise" machine. White noise describes a particular type of sound that is intended to soothe and relax us while masking background sound that can disturb our sleep. I know one fellow who uses a simple floor fan every night. This is an old school approach to white noise. He has to have the fan going. I'm told he has a small travel fan that fits into his suitcase when he traveling for business. If the family goes by car on a trip his wife says they lug their full size fan into the hotel with their suitcases. If they fly somewhere on vacation, they'll buy a fan and then donate it to the hotel when they leave. For him, the \$15 for a new fan from Walmart is worth it just to know he will sleep better. He's got to have that sound in the background. I think others of us can relate. It's called white noise because it contains all of the frequencies that can be detected by the human ear. This is the opposite of no sound. White noise is all sounds and if you don't want to go the floor fan route there are special mobile apps for our phones or tablets, or you can play a loop on the TV or computer screen. With white noise gently playing a person is wrapped in a blanket of sound so they don't hear what they don't want to hear. That's white noise. The other approach that can impact our hearing is quite different. It's known as "sound cancelling" technology. Special headphones or earbuds do just that, they cancel out sound. These high tech devices use what's called "active noise control." This is a lot more expensive than a cheap floor fan. High-tech speakers in the headphones or earbuds create specific waveforms that soften or eliminate unwanted sounds. The result is beautiful, blissful silence. So, there you have it. You can wrap yourself with every sound, white noise, and mute what you don't want to hear or you can eliminate every sound with the same result, blocking out what would otherwise be disturbing or distracting.

This brings us back to God's message, what God wants us to hear. The reading from the Book of Hebrews says the Word of God cuts through no matter what. Granted, there's a lot in our lives and world that may muffle what God wants us to hear. Think of it as the "white noise of life." Instead of the gentle and soothing sound of a floor fan this white noise is generated from all the confusion, commotion and busyness of life. The challenge of this is the fact we are often unaware of how all the stuff in life works to block out God's message for us. Remember, white noise is all sounds rolled together. And so, the white noise of life isn't just one thing it's everything: the noise that comes from the news of the day, the noise of negativity and complaining, the noise of all the ways we are over programmed or over committed in life. Our calendars and schedules often tell the story of life's white noise. Do you ever feel overwhelmed? Does it feel, at times, as if you can hardly breathe. We go from one thing to the next. We've got to do this and then we have to respond to that, and before we know it our lives are so filled with so much activity the noise of it all wraps us in a blanket of stress and worry. This can block out our ability to hear what God is saying to us. And it's not just life's white noise. Sometimes there's just silence when it comes to our relationship with God. It's like the sound of God's voice is cancelled out. Like before, sometimes we're not even aware this is happening. But then again, sometimes we intentionally decide we don't want to hear God's message for our lives. Spiritually speaking it's like we put on sound cancelling headphones. This is hard to admit, but sometimes we stop listening for God. I know another person who has experienced deep loss in their life. This is one of the toughest experiences in faith, disappointment with God. It's the feeling that God must not care, that God has turned away, and that the promises of God we used to trust now feel shallow and shaky. There's silence between us and God. We stop reading the bible. We come to church less often. We may even stop praying. The person I'm thinking of has checked out from their relationship with God. It can happen. Sometimes the pain we're living through makes it hard to keep listening for God so we just stop trying. There you have it, the white noise of life can muffle God's voice or a broken relationship with God prefers silence instead of listening for God. Where does this leave us? How is hope restored once more in our life with God.

We turn, again, to today's message from the Book of Hebrews. The Word of God cuts through no matter what and the message God has for us is that we are known through and through. It's like a two edged sword, says the scripture. God cuts through all the stuff of life, the busyness, the worry, the anxiousness, and the confusion. God knows us for who we are. Ultimately there's nothing that can block out God. This must have been what the psalmist

was thinking as he gave us the words of Psalm 139. "O Lord, you have searched me and known me...O Lord, you know [me] completely...Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts..." No amount of white noise and no attempt to silence God will ever prevail. God cuts through and gets to the heart of the matter. And because God knows us so completely God knows exactly what we need to hear and that message, that word, is Christ.

Do we hear the good news of Christ today? The God who knows us knows we need Christ. The message in Hebrews describes Jesus as a great and high priest. In other words, Jesus connects us to God. Jesus breaks through to us. When we are overwhelmed, or confused, or lost or lonely Jesus brings us to God. Even when it seems as if God is silent in our lives the gentle and persistent voice of our Lord keeps calling. Jesus won't leave us isolated. Jesus won't leave us in our stubborn silence. Jesus brings us, again and again, into the loving presence of God.

Friday was an autumn-like day. The cool and crisp air many of us have waited for finally arrived. Friday is my day off but it was still busy. Kelly and I were making ready for our kids to come home for the weekend. The house had to be ready, the refrigerator had to be filled, and the plans of what we would do and the logistics of how we would do it had to be worked out. With all of the activity in our family and house this weekend the white noise has been blowing. There has been lots happening and when so much is going on it's not easy to listen for God. But then, in the midst of all the preparation there was a moment when I stopped and took a deep breath. I looked around at the beautiful afternoon and thought, "This is really a great day." Then I looked down, and by that I mean I looked in. The word came to me, "You know why you do all of this, don't you?" Maybe that was God. Clearly it was the message I needed to hear. Of course, I know why we do all we did to make ready for our family. It is about love. It's about being known and knowing each other and realizing that being together is what really matters. The truth is usually right in front of us and God can help us see it and hear it. When that happens everything falls into in perspective.

This is who Jesus is for us. Jesus won't let us forget that we are known by God and Jesus wants us to know the difference God's great love can make. Everything else fades away when that message gets through. And that's what we can carry with us as we head into our week. Is it getting through, God's great love for you? There are some things we can do to tune our ears to listen for God. We can keep reading our bibles, we can keep participating in worship, and we can keep praying and prayer, by the way, is always more about listening for God than it is talking to God. God knows you and you can work to know God more intimately by reading your bible, renewing your commitment to worship as often as possible, and connecting to God in prayer. Jesus is with you in your effort to keep listening and I can't think of a better way to make the point of how important this is than the way our reading for this morning says it. We do it all "so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." (Hebrews 4:16) Amen.