

PARK HILL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
THE CENTENNIAL YEAR
“HIS MASTER’S VOICE”
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Matthew 3:13-17
ALL SERVICES

We live in an activist society where people are very impatient about getting things done. We want to eliminate poverty in a decade. We want to balance the budget in five years. We want to lose thirty pound in six months. We want to repair a relationship in one conversation with a therapist. Some problems require patience. We did not reach this landmark of 100 years over night.

A person’s voice may be so distinctive as to be the most identifiable part of the person. Voices are almost as individualistic as fingerprints. RCA has for years used a creative and enduring logo. It is the image of a large dog peering curiously into the large horn of one of the early victrolas, or talking machines as they were called. Beneath the image are three words that explain the dog’s obvious interest: **“His Master’s Voice.”**

Jesus began his public ministry by being baptized. It was the best of all possible beginnings. John the Baptist had in many ways prepared the way for Jesus’ coming, functioning very much in the manner of a Hebrew prophet calling the people to repentance. After trying to defer to Jesus, John agreed to baptize him. Jesus’ baptism was certainly an act of humility and an open acknowledgment of his dependence on God. As he came up out of the water there were dramatic signs of confirmation. The heavens parted and the Spirit of God descended on Jesus in the form of a dove. Then Jesus heard **“his Master’s voice.”** God said, **“This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”** Park Hill has also heard the Master’s voice. And sometimes it’s costly to follow Jesus. You may feel as if you are all alone! The cost of discipleship is never cheap.

Following his baptism, Jesus faced a rigorous time of testing in the wilderness with the devil. He fasted in the desert for forty days and forty nights. It isn’t

difficult to imagine that he frequently remembered his Father's word of blessing at his baptism and drew strength from it.

We all have voices in our memory. Some of these voices represent good memories and others represent unpleasant memories. There are other voices that live inside us. Some are helpful and we would be wise to listen to them. Others are harmful and we need to free ourselves from them. To integrate or not to integrate! Count me in, or count me out.

“Let your conscience be your guide” is thought by some to be the cardinal rule of right conduct and utterly trustworthy. Some naively consider the voice of conscience to be the voice of God. Unfortunately, the voice of conscience is more complicated than that. It is important to pay attention to one's conscience, but we need to honestly evaluate what we hear. One man spent 30 years in prison for a crime he did not commit because someone was following his/her conscience.

Sometimes the voice of conscience is only echoing another voice from our past. If you were taught as a child that dancing is a sin, you may hear an echo of that prohibition even at a square dance! All of us have voices from the past in our memory bank. If a parent told you once in a moment of anger that you were a bad child that may be hard to forget. If the parent told you this often and over a long period of time, it may have crippled you emotionally. What we hear as conscience may be a voice from the past that we need to ignore and forget.

At the other end of the spectrum is the risk of desensitizing the conscience. The male voice tends to change between childhood and adulthood. The voice of conscience may change as well. Some Indian tribes taught their young that they had an object in their chests that had sharp corners. When they did something that was forbidden, the object would turn in their chests and cause them pain. But when they did the forbidden thing long enough the sharp edges would be worn away and they would feel nothing at all. Samuel Butler said that the conscience, being well bred, **“soon leaves off talking to those who do not wish to hear it.”**

Conscience is a gift from God and is vital to our full humanity. Conscience is indispensable in producing character. There is hardly a more noble trait than to be a person of conscience. Still, conscience, like every other part of us, is susceptible to sin. It needs our attention and our continuing cultivation. But it also needs our critical judgment, because the voice of conscience is not always the voice of God. The Viet Nam War was a war of conscience, but whose conscience?

The voice of God at Jesus' baptism was not only divine confirmation of Jesus and his mission; it was an expression of the devotion and fidelity that characterized the relationship between Father and Son. The human Jesus, intimate as he was with God, needed clear lines of communication concerning God's will. The many hours he spent in prayer reveal how fervently he worked at understanding the purposes of God. The human dimension in Jesus' faith necessitated an ongoing process of listening, interpreting, and coming to terms with what he was hearing from God. How can one continue on a path that one knows does not favor God?

Christ is our master, and we are his disciples and followers. We have been encouraged to seek his presence, to be available to him, to be open to his will. But how do we know when we are hearing his voice? How do we know we are not hearing some other voice? Jesus himself warned his hearers that others would come making messianic claims and false promises. In our own time it is often difficult to distinguish the voice of Jesus among the thousands who claim to speak for him. How are we to recognize our master's voice?

As Jesus himself pointed out, sheep know the voice of their shepherd. How? Simply from their long association with him! The closer we follow Jesus, and the longer we follow him, the more readily we will recognize his voice. Spend enough time in prayer and you will come to know and recognize the voice of God. We will know his voice by its ring of truth, for he is the way, the truth, and the life. We will recognize his voice by its compassion for our enemies, and by its sadness for our sins, and by its grief for the suffering children of the world, who die of hunger. We will recognize his voice by its purity and simplicity - - in wanting nothing from us but lives lived in loving service to the neighbor and devotion to God.

A child's sense of worth begins with a parent's love. Throughout our lives that sense of worth is either reinforced or diminished by those with whom we share life. Their love and approval enhance our sense of worth. Their criticism and disapproval threaten that sense of worth. Ultimately, however, it is God's approval that matters, because only God can be trusted to always be all-knowing, truthful, and loving.

The standards of God remain unchanged. God is pleased with those who work for justice among the nations. God blesses those who heal the blindness of ignorance and prejudice, and break the chains of poverty and hunger.

Simon Peter said of Jesus that "*he went about doing good works.*" In fact, his life of good works was the primary evidence and confirmation of his relationship

to God. No one could do such good works apart from the spirit and power of God. That's the secret of Park Hill.

God's confirmation of Jesus came at his baptism. ***"This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."*** Park Hill's confirmation came at the point of its decision to be obedient to God's call upon the life of this congregation. And believe me; God has also indicated that the decision made by this congregation has been met with divine approval.

If you have compassion for those who called themselves your enemies, and for the suffering children of the world, who die of hunger, I would love to be your pastor. I would love for this Centennial congregation to be your church. Come Grow Your Spirit With Us in 2011.