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### *The Word Breaks Through*

I can still hear her voice. Whisper really. It was my mom. When I was 12 years old I had surgery related to my cerebral palsy. Surgery is always scary, but especially for a 12 year old. On the day of the surgery they let my mom come back with me as they wheeled me to the operating room at Children's Memorial Hospital when it was over in Lincoln Park. I can instantly go back to that moment in my memory. As they put the anesthesia mask on and I was holding my moms hand I remember what she said. She whispered that she loved me and then I went to sleep. The next thing I remember was waking up in post-op.

There is the voice of my grandpa. One person said that he and I were like twins just two generations apart. We shared so much in common. Including our love for politics and the packers. And there was something about his voice. He was a radio broadcaster in the 60's and 70's so maybe you can imagine what it sounded like. It was instantly recognizable and incredibly unique. His voice was so much a part of who he was. In a way- his voice, the things he said, and the way he spoke to me brought me into his world, created space for me to imagine ways that I might live and things that I might do. His voice still resounds in the echoes of my heart.

I remember the first time I heard the voice of a mentor and friend of mine as he presided at eucharist at what would become my home church. Who he was, what he experienced, how he carried himself, how he spoke the words of the liturgy, they began to slowly crack open a window into a future that I didn't know existed and that I could not create on my own. A future where I could reclaim an old faith tradition in a way that I was at home in my body and in the church. It was like a miracle as I was surrounded by the aroma of incense, fresh baked bread, festive wine, and the gathered assembly.

How about you? Whose voice spoke with comfort and assurance and power that seemed to be an extension of the very language of God to you? Whose voice opened up an expanse before you when you thought you were only stuck? Whose voice, put flesh on the promise of resurrection after you thought the past would hold you in bondage forever? Whose words built a house for you to live in by sheer grace?

We know those other words that duplicitously try to find their way into our lives. The ones that destroy, close us off, take away space, tell us who we will *always* be, speak fear with a kind of finality and cause us to tighten our fist. Voices that lure us into finding ourselves only through comparison to others. Those that whisper to us we are not good enough or we won't make it until our bank account has more zero's or our kid gets into that college.

Since the beginning the triune God has been one who speaks. At the sound of God's voice worlds and realities are created. This word does what it says. You can trust the sound. God said, "Let there be light." And there was. At the baptism of Jesus at the Jordan a voice came from Heaven. And in the fullness of time, at your own baptism, at the edge of the wilderness, for many of us with our whole lives ahead of us, that same voice spoke over you and me. There, that voice addressed you and said, "You are my child, the beloved, with you, I am well pleased." (speak names in the assembly) This is true and always will be. No matter what you have done and what pronouncements others, or your own inner critic have made about you or your worth, your past, present, or future.

The Word of God is a creative, living, and generative word. A word that resounds across time to reach you. This same word still addresses you in your dread, despair, lostness, shame, and every death. No present situation will have the final word. This one speaks life from death. Resurrection. This word does what it says. We can trust the sound amid all the noise.

It was Martin Luther who called the church a *mouth house*. It is in this place that we hear this word most clearly and consistently. We can count on it. When we hear it in this spacious gathered assembly with fine tuned gospel acoustics our ears become attuned to catching it outside of these walls. You know what it sounds like when it comes toward you as gift.

Hear, "you live, find your home, belong in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit." "Your sins are forgiven." "The body of Christ given for you." Now-- hear this word in a thousand different dialects, as you already have.

And, the Spirit has come to dwell in you. Your speech is animated by this word who found a home in you. Your voice, a part of the choir that is the body of Christ. Follow the inspiration of those whose voices first brought him to you even disguised as a stranger. Speak of love, welcome, mercy, and peace. The world needs the word in your voice in 2024. An election year where the voices of Christian nationalism and xenophobia will grow louder. What might we say together?

We carry him into all the world's broken places until in the fullness of time the word speaks to you and all those asleep in our tombs, inviting us to take our seat at the supper of the lamb with the words, "come for all is now ready."