



HOLLYWOOD
United Methodist Church
the **heart** of hollywood

CROSSFLIX SERIES – “THE KING’S SPEECH”

July 3, 2011

Sermon by Rev. Kathy Cooper-Ledesma, Senior Pastor

Scripture: Luke 1

Welcome to summer at Hollywood United Methodist Church! For the fourth consecutive summer, we are pleased to offer our Crossflix sermon series! Every year we expand the series; last year we added after-church talk backs with folks who were involved with that Sunday's film in some capacity.

This summer, in addition to talk backs on most Sundays (unfortunately not today due to the holiday weekend), we're offering pizza and a movie on Thursday night, so that if you haven't seen the movie for the coming week, or you want to see it again with others, you can! Last Thursday night we had a good group gather in Grant Hall to watch this morning's film, *The King's Speech*. How many of you have seen *The King's Speech*? Raise your hands? Good. I'm not going to go over the plot in its entirety, but rather allow certain scenes from the film to shine on their own. At its core this film is not only about the speech difficulties faced by an unlikely king; it's also about how we define ourselves within, and apart from, our families – as well as in what, and who, we put our faith.

Our Gospel text for this morning deals with these very issues, even though it's a story not often read in worship. It's the story of Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist. This is Da Vinci's portrait of John the Baptist – doesn't he bear a striking resemblance to the Mona Lisa? Now we know the story of John the Baptist – crazy man in the wilderness, wearing a hair shirt, eating locusts, who baptized Jesus. And we also know something about John's mother Elizabeth,

We remember that when Mary found out she was expecting, she went to Elizabeth's house and spent three months there, talking about God and their babies and the future. And that Elizabeth had given Mary a sign when she first arrived, telling Mary that her child “lept in her womb” when Elizabeth first saw her.

Here's the part of the story that isn't as familiar, and sets the context for the morning's scripture. Elizabeth and her husband Zechariah were pillars of the temple. Zechariah was one of the priests. Elizabeth served on every committee; they were the go-to people. But they had not been able to have a child; in those days, that was a sign of God's displeasure with them. In spite of the talk around the temple, they remained faithful servants of God, to the point where Zechariah was invited to light incense in the inner sanctum of the temple – a rare invitation, given only to the holiest of priests. Zechariah was honored but he was also nervous about it, because he had heard stories of other priests being consumed by fire and didn't want to risk angering God if he did something wrong.

Just as Zechariah steps into the inner sanctum of the temple and prepares to light the incense, suddenly there was the angel Gabriel to his side, telling Zechariah that he has a message from God. Elizabeth will become pregnant; she will bear a child that they will name John, and this child will grow up to be a prophet that will tell about the coming Messiah, the son of God. Now Zechariah started out nervous about being in the inner part of the temple; with this news he about has a nervous breakdown. And he responds probably in the same way you and I would: he tells Gabriel ok but, before I believe, I need a sign from God that these things will come to pass as you are saying.

Here is a *priest* who should know the stories, who should remember Abraham and Sarah... Talking to an angel that appeared before him with a message from God, and he wants a sign. And he got one: the angel told him he would be mute, unable to speak until his son is born and named John. And so Zechariah loses his ability to speak even as he gains the wonderful knowledge that he is going to become a father. ¹

The first scene from *The King's Speech* sets up the sub-plot of contrasting fatherhoods. Prince Albert has a debilitating stammer, exacerbated by the verbal and emotional abuse he received from his father growing up. In this clip he meets Professor Logue, an innovative and somewhat eccentric speech therapist – and learns that not all fathers and sons have the same type of relationship.

Unlike Prince Albert, Zechariah knows that his speech issue was to be of finite duration. So, when Elizabeth had given birth, the neighbors all came over to rejoice with the new parents and one of them said "Let's name him Zechariah!" Elizabeth said no, his name is John. They responded by saying "but no one in your family is named John! That can't be his name!" Zechariah motioned for a tablet, and wrote "His name is John." And Luke tells us Zechariah's tongue was loosed, and he could speak again.

Here's lesson one for this morning: Zechariah only lost his voice when he put his trust in himself, not in God. He lost his voice when he decided to put limits on what God could do in his life, in Elizabeth's life, in the lives of all those who would find God through the prophecies of the adult John the Baptist. But when Zechariah trusted in God and God's promises, he was able to find and reclaim his voice.

Now, trusting in God and God's promises – or sometimes trusting that God is working for our good through other people – that can be so very hard. In this next clip, we find Prince Albert struggling with the need to trust Lionel and his unorthodox methods – which include treating the whole person, not just the mechanics of speech.

Lionel called Prince Albert – who eventually became the King – by his family name "Bertie." Lionel knew that underneath all the expectations of the "royal family," underneath all the ways that this dysfunctional family had hurt one another through word and action, and in spite of a pattern of shutting himself off emotionally from others, that all Bertie needed to know was that he was loved and valued. That he was worthy of love; worthy of respect; and worthy of leading his country. He didn't learn that from his father; he learned that from Lionel -- who knew that once he claimed his worth, (which we Christians know comes from our understanding as beloved children of God), Bertie would be able to claim his own unique and prophetic voice.

In this final clip, Bertie is preparing for his coronation as King, and his counsel and the Archbishop has informed him that Professor Lionel is not exactly a learned man of letters. It's now up to Bertie to decide in whom he will trust: those who care for him as the King, or the one who cares for him as a person of holy and sacred worth.

I have a voice. You have a voice. And you have a choice to claim your voice and to use your voice to make a difference; to share the good news of the love of God in Jesus Christ with others now, today, in this community.

Think about it – your voice, my voice, our voices together may be the only voice of God that others ever have the opportunity to hear. If we do not tell others about the power of God's gracious and all-inclusive love, how will they know?

Let me give you an example of what can happen when we find our voice.

Last week we had "Lady Gaga Sunday" in which we talked about each of us being born in the image of God, and the word in music –wonderfully done by Megan Vaughn and David Hall Page –was Gaga's *Born this Way*. Chad put the video of the word in music on YouTube, many of you tweeted about it, and as of this morning it has received nearly 13,000 views. Amen? We might be the only voice of God's gracious and all inclusive love that someone hears.

Week before last in my weekly email I asked folks to suggest topics for future sermon series in 2012. One response asked, paraphrasing, How to find your voice as a Christian in Hollywood and in doing so not be met by eye rolling or derision. We've looked at the demographics and know that over 80% of folks who live in the 3 zip codes closest to the church would consider themselves spiritual but not religious. What that tells me is that clearly we have some work to do.

Like King George, we need to continue finding -- and perfecting -- and speaking -- our voice so that others can hear of the abundant and inclusive love of God in Jesus Christ.

That there is a progressive church in town that believes in loving God with our head and heart but also with our hands and feet. That the church that has a voice on marriage equality and believes that all means all – amen? – that that same church is also committed to loving God and our neighbors, to being, really being, the body of Christ and, working to bring forth peace and justice in this broken and hurting world, speaking out against homelessness and hunger and poverty.

This is the voice that we need to find and claim for ourselves. Like Zechariah, we will find our true voice when we trust in God and God's promises. As we gather around the table, let us give thanks for that voice, and that God will increase our ability to love and serve others in Christ's name.

Amen.

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¹ Dr. Scott Black Johnston, "Head of Household?" sermon posted at day1.org, December 17, 2006, http://day1.org/1021-head_of_household