**David hears God’s voice.** Now bridge those ideas to the voice of the Lord in Psalm 29. The voice of the Lord is both powerful and majestic. It is like a storm that crashes onto the beach. Whipping up the waves. Ripping the skies apart with thunder. Felling trees and stripping branches. Everyone knows when the Lord speaks, just as everyone knows that a storm is thrashing around them.

This is a Psalm ascribed to David, a broken and redeemed shepherd-become-king. A heart-on-his-sleeve kind of guy. A man whose writings drip with existential weight. The voice of God was more than just a symbol for David. Psalm 29 was more than a simple temple song praising God through nature. David heard God! God's voice was as personal as it was powerful, and it was all around him like the thrashing of a storm.

In Scripture, God *led* people, and they described that experience in terms of God's *speaking* to them. Abraham. Moses. Gideon. David. Samuel. God spoke to them about the special works of redemption they would perform for God’s people. But God also spoke to people like Hagar (Genesis 16) and Ananias (Acts 9) who performed smaller works that fulfilled God’s purpose. And God speaks to us!

Jesus describes our conversions in Revelation 3:20: "Listen! I standing at the door and knock; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me." Jesus describes our coming to faith as hearing his voice and responding to it. The result is an intimate picture of communing together over a meal. It is difficult to imagine sharing an intimate dinner with a person and not speaking to them.

**So, just how does God speak to us?** The primary means is through the Scriptures. We call the Bible the "Word of God," and believe it to be God-breathed (2 Timothy 3:16). But this is more than a pat theological answer; it is a perspective that should shape how we read the Bible. We should engage Scripture with a practical theology of inspiration. The Bible is not just conceptual, words to be read simply as information. The Scriptures are words spoken and inspired by God, so reading them is essentially listening to God speaking still. Bible reading is relational first and informational second.

But beyond the words of Scripture, we may be led by God's Spirit in some specific ways. An internal voice. A sense of conviction. A seemingly inspired reflection. The sage words of a friend. Experiences that undoubtedly defy coincidence. We often describe these experiences as "God speaking" or as "hearing God's voice."

Our Methodist sisters and brothers explain how God speaks to us using the "Wesleyan Quadrilateral." The primary source is ***Scripture***, which is supported by the ***Tradition*** of church history, our ***Reason*** in thinking and interpreting, and lived out in ***Experience***, the most personal of all forms of support. Applying this to discerning God’s Word for us, we could say that someone's Experience of hearing God's leading should be in harmony with what is confirmed by Reason, demonstrated in Tradition, and as primarily revealed in Scripture.

**Just how do we know it is God speaking? God’s voice comes in as many forms as there are people to hear it.** The voice of the Lord is powerful and awe-inspiring in Psalm 29, but it is still and small before Elijah. So, what would God's voice be like for us? How do we differentiate God's voice from our own thoughts or messages of culture? We might not be crazy, but we do have a lot of voices in our heads!

Dallas Willard notes three qualities by which we can know God's voice from others. QUALITY: God's voice carries substance and weight, making an impact, bringing peace, lifting us up, and inspiring compliance. SPIRIT: God's voice is rarely loud, flashy, or dramatic; it does not argue, but calmly assures us of itself. CONTENT: Words from God will always conform to God's nature, God's Scripture, and God’s heart as revealed in Jesus Christ. God's voice will never tell you that you are worthless, or encourage you to lie, or mislead you about God's intention.

In essence, these factors are akin to the spirits of consolation and desolation in Ignatian spirituality. When a voice consoles us (brings peace, calm, assurance, worship) it is more likely to be from God because it draws us toward God. When a voice leaves us desolate (confused, chaotic, anxious) it is rarely from God because it pulls us away from God.

**So, how do we listen for God's voice? To hear God’s voice, you must create space for God to speak into your life.** Silence, solitude, journaling, mentors, and trial-and-error all create the space to listen for God. But it takes practice. You do not sit down to the piano and bang out Beethoven; you first play scales. You do not wake up and decide to run a marathon; you walk or jog your first two-miler and build from there.

Someone said, "Practice does not make perfect; it just makes things permanent." Without practice, things can be neither perfect nor permanent. You do not want to practice mistakes, or they become permanent mistakes, but making a practice of listening for the voice of God can lead, if not to perfection, than to something that approaches it.

Listening well for the voice of God must be understood similarly. Living in wisdom, knowing the Scriptures, trusting the community of faith, and making mistakes are all part of learning to listen for God's voice over a lifetime.

As Jesus left his disciples behind, he told them he had much more to say to them. But he left that speaking to the work of the Spirit (John 16). God still wants us to hear from God today: through the Scriptures and through God’s internal leading voice. Just like the words of a dear friend or Roger 2.0, God's speaking is what allows us to know God, trust God, and love God more intimately.

Prayer: Lord, I praise You as my Shepherd for You are the one who speaks so that I may hear Your voice and follow You where you lead. Thank you for telling us the truth about Yourself and about ourselves. I confess any lack of desire or any personal failure in hearing Your voice.  Help me to have ears to hear what Your Spirit is speaking today. Give me listening ears to hear Your voice and discern Your voice from the many voices that are speaking, for I would be a disciple of Jesus Christ. Amen.

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***Vox Dei***

Sunday, January 10, 2021 Psalm 29

Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

Roger Ebert (1942-2013) was an American film historian, journalist, screenwriter, and author. He was a film critic for the *Chicago Sun-Times* from 1967 until his death in 2013. Interestingly, in 1975, Ebert became the first film critic to win the Pulitzer Prize for Criticism. When Ebert voiced his cheers or jeers, it could mean millions in profit swing for a movie. The coveted and trademarked "Two Thumbs Up!" rating from Ebert and his partner Gene Siskel (1946-1999) could mean an academy award nod or a spike in video sales.

Amid a career that was "two thumbs way up," tragedy struck Ebert in 2006 when he was diagnosed with thyroid cancer. The cancer left Ebert without a lower jawbone and unable to speak, a significant disability for a television personality. Five years and 10 surgeries later, Ebert took to wearing turtlenecks to cover his surgical scarring and hold up his boneless lower jaw. His mouth hung agape in a quirky smile that was both eerie and endearing.

Reduced to scribbling notes, Ebert wanted his voice back. A self-confessed technology junkie, Ebert turned his critical ear toward computer text-to-speech reading voices. After trying several that did not suit his standards for rhythm and intonation, he settled on Alex, the now standard reading voice that comes on every Mac. Ebert also worked with a Scottish company called CereProc to create his own computer voice called Roger 2.0. CereProc used Ebert’s 30 years of voice recordings to piece together Roger 2.0's vocabulary.

But these electronic voices lack the natural human qualities that most of us never think about when speaking. Dramatic pauses on big words. Upward inflection before question marks. The ability to selectively emphasize words for effect. These qualities help us recognize a person's voice as uniquely that person. The act of speaking is indelibly tied to a person's identity. Our voice affects how we view ourselves. Others place great value on our voice as the essence of our personality. Our voice represents our relational connection with others. Our voices are personal, relational, and in those senses, very powerful.