

God Whispers: How Scripture Sounds to Me

A Sermon on 2 Peter 1:16-21

Rev. Dr. John Suk. August 27, 2017. Lawrence Park Community Church

Imagine, for a moment, a school library. This isn't just any library, though. It is, rather, a majestic Harry Potter, Hogwarts sort of library—a cavernous room in an old building with shining dark wooden tables and leaded stained-glass windows. Golden brass door knobs and chandeliers hang from the ceilings. And, here in this library, all is silent, except that . . .

. . . two teens, Malik and Jenna, are whispering to each other. Looking at them, I notice that Malik is looking at Jenna with great intensity, and that Jenna is blushing. I notice that as they whisper, back and forth, the students at the table behind them are trying to listen in. I also notice that the librarian is looking at them, and that he is on the cusp of shushing them.

In spite of how everything about the library screams, “Quiet!” Malik and Jenna are whispering. Why?

Well . . . **Whispers matter, don't they?** Malik and Jenna whisper back and forth because what they have to say to each other is worth taking the risk to say—we whisper about important stuff that has to be heard, even if it is risky to do so. Alex and Jenna whisper to each other even though the Librarian might snap at them or even send them out; they whisper to each other because what they have to say is something they just have to get off of their chests, even if others are trying to listen in, and might gossip or laugh at them. We whisper when it really matters, when the situation is urgent and we can't wait.

And, whispers are intimate: Jenna's blush suggests that Alex might be saying something very personal. Maybe he is asking her on a date. Maybe he is telling her that he doesn't want to go a dance with her because he is, after all, gay. Maybe he is telling Jenna that her best friend is angry with her. Who knows? But whispers, almost by definition, are intimate. Even in an empty bedroom, with windows closed, and when no one but our lover is within miles of us, we whisper when we say, “I love you.” Whispers are intimate.

Whispers also demand attention. Malik and Jenna are not actually making a lot of noise as they whisper to each other. They don't want others to hear, after all. But still, the librarian is irritated and wants to shush them. Malik and Jenna, just because they are whispering, demand attention. The kids at the next table want to overhear what they're saying and so the strain to listen, too. A good teacher or preacher or politician knows how to shift gears from loud to conversational to just a whisper, so that everyone in the audience is sitting on the edge of their seats, trying to hear every word. There is an old African proverb that says the whisper of a pretty girl can be heard further than the roar of a lion—whispers, though quiet, demand attention.

Many whispers—not always, but not uncommonly—many whispers are subversive.

The truth is that what Malik really wants Jenna to do is cut their next class—Biology—so that they can go to Starbucks and study for their upcoming History test together. Now, Malik’s plan to skip class is against the rules. If the librarian hears of it, he will probably pass this information on to the Biology teacher. Jenna and Malik will get detentions. So, they whisper their plans to each other just because they are subversive. President Obama reminded us of how whispers are subversive in a campaign speech. “Yes we can. [These words were] *whispered* by slaves and abolitionists as they blazed a trail towards freedom through the darkest of nights. Yes we can.”

Whispers also tend to give voice to hard truths we do not want to hear, but should. I don’t know if this was the case with Malik and Jenna, mind you, unless the hard truth was Jenna’s objection to Malik’s plan, when Jenna said, “Malik we can’t, we’ll be caught, we’ll get a detention.” But Shel Silverstein has a good poem about how hard truths are often whispered. The poem, titled, “The Little Boy and the Old Man,” goes like this:

Said the little boy, Sometimes I drop my spoon.
Said the little old man, I do that too.
The little boy *whispered*, I wet my pants.
I do too, laughed the old man.
Said the little boy, I often cry.
The old man nodded. So do I.
But worst of all, said the boy, it seems
Grown-ups don't pay attention to me.
And he felt the warmth of a wrinkled old hand.
I know what you mean, said the little old man.

Hard truths are whispered truths.

And finally, whispers are the best way to speak great truths. Malik insists, in his whisper to Jenna, that if they study together, they will pass. Not the greatest truth perhaps, but true enough. An old Rabbinic saying says that “Every blade of grass has an angel that bends over it and whispers, ‘Grow.’” It is a lovely image. I would amend that saying, however, so that it reads: “In scripture God bends over each of us, and whispers, ‘you are beloved.’”

I began this message by describing a vast and beautiful library that nevertheless somehow, mysteriously, called attention to even the faintest whispers. The Bible is like that too. The Bible is a library of spiritual books in which, if we pay careful attention, we can hear the divine whisper of God.

I know that this is a mystery. In our text for today, the Apostle Peter says, “You will do well to be attentive to [scripture] as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.

These ancient lamps were mere sputtering wicks floating in a bowl of olive oil. Unlike our modern electric flashlights or chandeliers, these ancient lamps were dim, smoky affairs, just a whisper of struggling light, barely enough to see your feet and prevent you from stumbling in the dark. Not much light at all.

In a similar way, scripture can be a lamp unto our feet, as the Psalmist says, a divine whisper that is enough to save us from stumbling badly. But scripture is not merely a whisper. Because, you see . . .

From the Sermon on the Mount to the story of a mysterious resurrection, what God whispers matters most for life and hope. God's whispers are meant for me, intimately, even as other people try to listen in. And yet, this whispering God demands my attention, my life, my all. This divine whisper is subversive too, calling me to act justly and to love mercy and to live humbly—no matter what our culture shouts about the how it is really all about me, myself, and I. The divine whisper in scripture suggests that there are hard truths we need to understand about our weaknesses and shortcomings if we are going to be all that we can be.

But always, on nearly every page, in each of its many books, what the Bible whispers that matters most, the Bible's greatest truth, is that since we are beloved, we can also love others.

And when the whispering is done, that is worth shouting from the rooftops.