

January 12, 2020
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I have a fun-fact for you this morning. Who here knows or can guess what the loudest thing ever shouted by a human being was? It's a world record that was set in the 'nineties, and I promise it's not a *bad* word. Anybody have a guess? What was the loudest thing ever shouted by a person?

The loudest word ever shouted was, ironically, the word "quiet." And I think any of you who are parents probably know what I'm talkin' about, right? It was shouted by a primary school teacher named—yeah, a school teacher, that makes sense—named Annalisa Flannagan, who entered a *shouting* competition, of all things, and managed to shout the word "quiet" *at one hundred twenty one* decibels, which is the same volume as a *chainsaw*.

And I love that she picked a word like "quiet." Not anything big or bombastic like "crash!" or "get down!" or any of our favorite four-letter words. And it's the word she picked that's got me thinking about the Scripture we just heard.

See in Psalm 29 God is *noisy*. This is the God of all the loud noises in the world. The God you can hear when lightning strikes a tree or a telephone pole right outside your house and the thunder shakes the whole building. The God you can't ignore when the waves crash over Long Beach Avenue in the middle of a flood warning... or what the people of Puerto Rico must have felt in their bones when the earthquake struck last week.

This is one of the oldest Psalms in the Bible, going back to prayers made before the ancient Israelites *were* the ancient Israelites... when humanity was in its infancy, and the people of Canaan were trying to... make *sense* of the *world* and the *God* that they experienced in something so *elemental* as the storms that shake our world to this day.

And the voice of the God of this Psalm—our God—is also the voice that cries out against pain and injustice in this world. It's the voice American GI's heard crying in chorus as they discovered the Jews and so many others suffering under Nazi tyranny. It's the voice of families shouting in fear as bombs fall or monsoons rage or warlords chase them from their homes. It's the voice of the roaring fires of Australia and the thunder of hurricanes that get bigger and louder year after year, crying out at

the pain we've caused this Earth since our Industrial Revolution belched the first clouds of smog into the air.

But the Psalm suddenly, and with ease, switches tacks at the very end; did you notice? First there's all this *noise*, all this glorious and terrible cacophony of a great and powerful God... and then out of nowhere the last line: peace. "May the Lord bless his people with peace!"

It makes me think of the teacher using the word "quiet" to set the world record of loudest thing ever shouted. "Quiet." Peace.

You and I both know—we've all experienced it—that the voice of God can be heard in both the loud moments *and* the quiet ones.

We can sense the power of something greater than ourselves when a windstorm or a microburst blows against the boards of our house. *And* we can feel the beauty and tranquility of a still, moonlit night that stirs our hearts like nothing else. We can feel dwarfed by the hugeness of God in the crowded streets of a place like New York City: the *symphony* of voices and feet and traffic at *our* level, watched over by the grandeur of the skyscrapers towering above our heads. *And* we can know the miracle of God in the faintest coo of a happy newborn baby resting on your chest.

God lives in both places. Like how water can be a still and tranquil lake, where you can spend hours fishing and the loudest sound you hear all afternoon is the breeze rustling the leaves on the far bank... or it can be Niagra Falls, thundering one constant rush that you can feel deep down in your soul and drowns out all other voices.

Speaking of water, I've got *another* fun-fact for you. Relative to its size, what do you think is the loudest animal in the world? It's an underwater animal; can somebody give me a guess what might be the loudest animal relative to how big it is? Any guesses?

Relative to its size, which is only about two millimeters, the loudest animal on Earth is called a water boatman. It's an *insect*, and it's the kind that walks on water—you know, like Jesus did. It sort of skates along the top of the water, and it can even sit there, like it was standing on solid ground. Well they can also go *underwater*, and when they do once they're down there they make a noise in the same kinda way that a cricket does when it rubs its legs together, and the *sound* the water boatman makes...

is *ninety nine decibels*, about as loud as a *freight train*. And it's two millimeters long! It doesn't *sound* that loud to *us* because it's underwater when it makes it, but that's the sound it makes: the loudest animal for how small it is. It's that juxtaposition: something so tiny, cradled in the silence of deep water, making such a loud noise.

I think of the line from the Psalm Shawn read for us: "The voice of the Lord is over the waters."

Do you remember Genesis? "In the beginning... when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters."

Water *again*. Noisy and quiet and *holy*. Today, two weeks after Christmas, is traditionally when Christians would celebrate the baptism of Jesus. The official beginning of Jesus' ministry on Earth, years after he was born on Christmas Day, was when he made his way to the Jordan River, and John the Baptist submerged him under the water and blessed him by the power of the Holy Spirit.

And in the words of Matthew 3: "And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

It's all *connected*—this voice of God, and water, and loudness, and silence. You can notice a little irony *here* too, just like the teacher who shouted *quiet*—God doesn't make some bombastic shout or clap of thunder when Jesus is baptized. His head breaks free from the surface of the water... and a tiny dove alights on his shoulder, and the voice of God from the heavens comes *calmly*, no exclamation mark, with the word "pleased," which is one of the gentlest words there is.

We have a God that is big and loud when God needs to be, and we have a God that lives in the silence too. Remember the "still small voice" where the prophet Elijah found God. First there was a wind so strong it split rocks, then an earthquake, then a pillar of roaring fire... but when all that was done Elijah came out of his shelter and heard the still small voice of God. He found God in the voice of fragile silence.

Get you a God that can do both. That's my advice to anybody who's seeking today. A God that can explode with strength and power and the cries of a thousand hearts pouring their *everything* out... and a God who can sit there when the last thing you want to hear is a *voice*... and let you curl up alongside, lay your head down, and stroke your hair, as you seek peace. The eye of the storm. The calm at the center of that Storm God of Canaa.

God can *be* that for you... and I truly believe that anything we learn about God teaches us something about ourselves. Because we are reflections of God. Made in God's image, we all have a piece of God inside us, and if God's power and strength can be found in loudness *and* in silence... so can ours.

Our God is loud and quiet, and our faith-life should reflect that. I'll say that again: Our God is loud *and* quiet, and our faith-life should reflect that.

When we pray, we can at times be solemn, staid, head-down, prim and proper... but sometimes when we pray we should be *loud*. When we reach out to God sometimes it needs to be full of cries of pain, sadness, even anger. Even argument! And that is *right*, just as right as the head bowed in silence.

And when we *act* on our faith, sometimes we do it by telling people *about* God, or about church, or about the Good News of Jesus Christ... or maybe it's speaking *truth* to *power* like the prophets of old... but some aren't comfortable doing that or don't have that gift, or maybe it's just not the right moment for it or it's not what those ears need to hear and might actually do more harm than good. *Our* voice of God doesn't *always* have to be loud, and the wisdom of God can tell us when our voice can be silent, while we allow our actions, our acts of love, our *Christian* acts to do the talking. When our actions are Christ-like they often speak louder than words.

And our *internal* life too: it can be calm, peaceful, receptive, and open. We can come to church on Sunday, and we can open ourselves to let God to come to us on God's own time... but our internal life can *also* be one of action: of seeking, exploring, engaging. Noisy work.

May you experience God in the loud and bombastic and dramatic and show-stopping moments of your life... and may you *hear* the voice of God when the world and the *people* of the world *cry out*...

And may you experience God in the silence, the peace, the understated moments, the quiet pools of water and the bubbling streams and the comfort of solitude... and may you hear the voice of God speaking in between the lines, straight to your heart.

May all our souls reflect the God whose Spirit breathes life into us. May God flow through us in our noise and our silence. May God speak through us when we *shout...* and when we whisper “peace.”

“May the Lord give strength to his people! May the Lord bless his people with peace!” Amen.