

# Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity

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Preacher: Rt Rev. Bishop Daniel Gifford

[ 0 : 00 ] Father, we thank you for your word that is like thunder, as the psalm says. Thank you for your Holy Spirit who works so powerfully through your word.

And we ask that you will open the eyes of our hearts to your glory, your goodness, and your love for us. That we would be strengthened and know your peace by your word and by your power.

In Jesus' name we ask. Amen. So you guys have been in a series on the psalms, is that right? And which psalm did you preach on last week?

You can't remember. Okay. I'm putting you on the spot. And so I thought, well, I'd follow up the psalm reading with this psalm 29, which is a marvelous, marvelous psalm about God's word.

And the psalm that we are reading is one of a number of psalms that are about the glory of God. They express in song and in poem how glorious God is in his majesty and goodness.

[ 1 : 09 ] There's nothing like God's glory in the world, the psalms say here. It is about his beauty and his goodness and his love far beyond anything we can imagine.

And our world wants to make God to be small. It understands that God is one of many gods, the God that we worship.

Or they think it's a personally held opinion. I mean, you know what your friends might be saying if they're not Christian, who God is. The assumption of many is that God is something that we create. Like we come up with the idea of who God is. But God's glory revealed in this psalm and in the Bible really demolishes those ideas.

Because there's a weightiness of God's glory that's far beyond what a human could come up with. It's far beyond anything that we have seen.

[ 2 : 07 ] So it's very important for us to know the glory of God, something about it, to taste something about the glory of God. Because this is what helps us and strengthens us to trust God.

And to worship God with all of our hearts. And to love him with our heart, mind, soul. And one of the very helpful books about the glory of God is the book Knowing God by Jim Packer.

And if you have not read the book, I invite you to do that as soon as you can again. It takes a lot of thought to go through. It's very thought-provoking.

But he talks a lot about the glory of God. Because if you want to know God, you need to know that he is the God of glory. And he says to form the right idea of God's glory, the Bible teaches us two steps to take.

And I love how practical they are. He says, first, we have to remove from our thoughts limits that would make God small. That's the first thing. Remove from your thoughts limits that would make God small.

[ 3 : 15 ] And then the second thing he says is to compare God with power and forces which we regard as great. Compare God to powers and forces that we think are great.

That's exactly what David is doing in this song. And what David does here in taking that second step is he writes a song that shows how God's glory is revealed in the power of his voice.

And you get a real taste of God's glory in the power of God's word, his voice. And so what David does is he compares that word to a thunderstorm.

Now, to help understand this song, you have to be able to experience a thunderstorm. And you're living in Ottawa. I think you guys have thunderstorms here, which is a good thing. Vancouver, we didn't have thunderstorms.

Hardly ever. Very unusual. And so my boys did not grow up with them at all. When they were little, not that, I mean, they were eight and ten, I remember. We went to Whistler, where they do have storms in the mountains.

[ 4 : 25 ] We were walking along near the village, where all of a sudden one of those mountain thunderstorms came rushing in. We, it got all black.

You could hear thunder in the distance. And we ran underneath kind of an overhang. And suddenly there was this strong wind, bright flash of lightning that felt like it was right in us.

And this instantaneous explosion, like this noise of thunder. And it was actually pretty frightening. And then there was this hail, and then it was gone.

And I immediately turned to my boys. He said, I said, your first thunderstorm, that wasn't so bad, was it? But I was actually quite struck by its immense power. And it was frightening.

And that's what David is comparing God's glory to, his voice. He says, the voice of God is a voice that thunders. That power that we experienced in that thunderclap.

[ 5 : 25 ] He said, that gives you a little foretaste, a little sense of the immense power of God's speech, his word. And so to bring home to us the glory of God and his word, he says three things about God's voice.

Three things. He tells us the source of God's word. And he tells us the effect of God's word. And then finally he tells us what the goal of God's word is.

And I want to briefly look at those as we just work our way through the psalm. So if you can turn to Psalm 29, that would be very, very helpful. And the first thing he says about the source is that it comes from heaven.

You know, Jesus said that about himself, right? I mean, he said only he had come from heaven. He's the only voice that has come down from heaven and is the word of God.

But listen to this in verses one and two. Ascribe to the Lord, O heavenly beings, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. Ascribe to the Lord glory due his name.

[ 6 : 31 ] Worship the Lord in the splendor of holiness. And you see what he's doing here. David is calling on heavenly beings to give God glory and strength and to worship him in the splendor of his holiness.

And he says this because if they are meant, if those who are in heaven are meant to worship God, then everyone in the world is meant to worship him as well.

And if God's voice comes from heaven with that kind of authority, that is the word to listen to, to think and to meditate. It's the one that you want to hear with all your heart.

And Isaiah picks up on this, you know, this fact that God's word is from heaven. And it's something that is far beyond heaven and earth.

He says, for as the heavens are higher than the earth, in Isaiah 55, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. And that's such an important word for us today, that God's word comes from heaven.

[ 7 : 33 ] Because our world tries to muzzle God's word and his voice so that it conforms to our present day thinking, our conventional wisdom.

But the glory of God's voice is that it's from heaven. It is the voice that has actually brought this world into existence. He has brought you into existence as well, just by his word.

He is the one that everyone in heaven, as these verses say, and on earth, are designed to worship. And they're actually called to worship. And that God speaks to us, that glorious God.

It's an amazing thing. It's not a word from earth to earth or earth to heaven. God speaks from heaven. And there's a great effect to that word.

Now, I want you to notice that God's word, because it's wiser than any of our wisdoms, or a greater justice than anything good that we could think of, and love greater than we can think of, it's this voice that's worth hearing to.

[ 8 : 40 ] And that's why three times in these two verses, the psalm says, ascribe glory to God. And what he reminds us in doing that is he says, this is a word that's worth listening to humbly and obediently, without argument and objection, because his holiness and his goodness comes to us through it.

You know, in receiving that word and hearing and obeying it, there is this deep goodness that comes into our hearts and into our minds. So there is the source.

It is actually a word from heaven for us. And the word, the thunderstorm of God's voice that begins in heaven in verses 1 and 2, it comes down to earth, if you notice, in the rest of the psalm, verses 3 through 9.

And so in those verses, you not only see that God's, where the origin of God's word is, it's from heaven, we see the effect of God's voice as well. And it's quite an effect on the earth and on the water.

David is a bit of a storm tracker in this psalm. And I don't know if you've been seeing the news of Hurricane Lee. It's being tracked very carefully as it makes its way.

[ 9 : 55 ] And where is it going to hit land? David is doing this. He's following the path of God's word, the storm. And he sees that that storm of God's word changes the world.

It turns us upside down. It starts over the water in the Mediterranean in verse 3. So he says, The voice of the Lord is over the waters. The God of glory thunder.

The Lord over many waters. The voice of the Lord is powerful. The voice of the Lord is full of majesty. The people listening to this for the first time would have been quite struck by it.

Because water was a sign of chaos and of death and destruction in the Old Testament. And so that's why there's the great flood that destroys the world.

And the Red Sea was the instrument of God's wrath. And also there was chaos and fear through which people had to be saved.

[ 10 : 55 ] So Noah is saved through the flood. And the people of Israel through the dangers and the death of the Red Sea. And so God's promise to Noah and to Moses to save their people really thundered over those waters.

Over the waters of the flood and over the waters of the Red Sea. And his word was much more powerful than the forces of fear and destruction that Noah faced.

And that the people of God faced in Egypt. Those words were full of majesty. Because out of love for his people, God, their king, is saving them.

And this is a word for us this morning. Because I know that many of you are facing various things that cause you, would cause you to be fearful. Or that there may be chaotic waters that trouble your heart and your soul this morning.

It may be you're facing uncertainty or a lack of direction. You're worried about somebody who is close to you. There might be a sense of your own frailty.

[ 12 : 00 ] Or you see the pain in the world around you, which really can hit our hearts. When you look and see what has happened to Morocco with that earthquake. Your hearts are struck by it.

We see every day the deep confusion of our world about who we are. Our identity. Our sexuality. How God designed us.

That has been lost and obscured in our world. There is a deep sense of confusion. And here there is this majestic, powerful voice which promises to you things that are true.

That actually thunder over your fears and uncertainty and death. They actually kind of burst through God's word to us. And many of those promises are Jesus' own word.

And I do invite you when you read God's word to really think, what is God promising in this word that I'm reading today? What is he saying that he has for you?

[ 13 : 05 ] Well, John 6, for instance, says, Jesus says, this is the will of my father that everyone who looks to the son and believes in him should have eternal life. And I will raise him up on the last day.

That is the promise that defines our life and our future and our present. And Jesus' word says, behold, I am with you always to the end of the age. He is with us, that he is in us, that he is intimately close to us to the end of the age, whatever happens in this world.

And then David himself constantly heard God's promise to be with him even in death. It drowned out death. So he said, even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for you are with me.

See, those are powerful and majestic words of promise to you that rules your fears. It rules your uncertainties and the things that trouble my soul and your soul.

God saves you every day. He saves you by his voice, by those promises that he is giving every day. But I want you to know that there is something much more far-reaching than this about God's word.

[ 14 : 24 ] Because it not only carries us through the things that trouble us, but it actually shakes our world. And it tears down the pride that you and I suffer from.

Pride is constantly kind of rearing up its head in our hearts, in our minds. And God turns our lives upside down in a good way. You know, I always tell people who have a first child, I said, it's going to turn your life upside down in a really good way.

But it won't be the same. And that's the truth with God's word. Look at verse 5 and 6. David follows the thunderstorm of God's word from water to land in Lebanon.

And the most impressive thing about the land around Israel, to the north of Israel and in Lebanon, was the forest. Incredible forest. And the greatest of the trees of the forest was the cedar.

If you look at the flag of Lebanon, what is in the middle of the flag? It's a big cedar tree. It's a beautiful flag, actually. And those trees were strong.

[ 15 : 31 ] They grew to 120 feet high, 10 feet in diameter. They were very long-lived, and they had a beautiful aroma. The resin from it is just beautiful to smell.

And they were used to build the world's great palaces in Egypt and also Solomon's temple as well. And David paints a picture of God breaking through and breaking down those massive trees in verse 5.

The thing that's the pride of Lebanon is broken down. And then he takes us from Lebanon to this mighty, immovable Mount Syrian, which is Mount Hermon.

You can see it up in the north of Israel, this huge mountain that's almost 10,000 feet high. And he says, God's voice makes that mountain skip like a young wild ox.

And then from there, the storm moves down to the massive forbidding wilderness of Kadesh. And it makes an earthquake happen that strips the forest bare.

[ 16 : 36 ] Well, why does God do this? Why does he give us that picture? And I'll ask another puzzling question. All of a sudden, we hear that there is a deer that is born.

And it's interesting. In the middle of it all, in God's voice, a deer gives birth. His voice brings about new life in the midst of this upheaval. Why is that happening?

Well, it's because it's showing us that God breaks down those things that oppose him. It actually tears down our pride.

You know, we can think of ourselves as being as impressive as the cedars of Lebanon. And we can find ourselves in a spiritual wilderness like Kadesh that really needs to be shaken. And only God's word has the power to break through our pride and to crush hearts of stone.

And in the midst of that, bring about living hearts. Like that little fawn that was born. Making us alive to God. Because his word has torn down like an earthquake.

[ 17 : 46 ] The trees of our pride. The wilderness of the sense of being far away from God. The power of God's voice makes our hearts alive to God and dead to sin.

And so that's the thunderstorm of God's voice that does this mighty work. I don't know if any of you have heard of John Donne. He is a famous poet.

And one of his most famous poems from the 17th century was one that you wouldn't hear written probably today. But I want to read a couple of lines from it.

He says, Now we don't often pray like this.

But you see what he's saying. You know, we often will ask for things that benefit us immediately.

Which is a good thing. But we don't often ask God to batter our hearts like he is doing here with the thunder of God's word.

[ 18 : 57 ] Well, John Donne does this because he wants God to overthrow his sin and make him new. He wants God to make him alive to God.

And that's what God's voice does for us. That's what David is talking about here in this marvelous psalm. And this is how God works in our life.

God the Holy Spirit convicts the world of sin. He leads us into his truth. He brings Jesus into our lives so that we, our daughters and sons of God, deeply loved by the Heavenly Father.

And we receive this incredible gift of the forgiveness of sins. It only is God batters our hearts that we receive that gift of the forgiveness of sins.

The Holy Spirit inhabits God's word. He makes it a living word that burns in our hearts. The Holy Spirit always goes with God's word.

[ 19 : 56 ] Look at verse 7. It says, The voice of the Lord flashes forth flames of fire. Literally, it says that God's voice is dividing flames of fire. Well, what do you think of when you think of that verse of dividing flames of fire?

You think of the day of Pentecost. You can't help but think about the Holy Spirit resting on the people of God at that time. And, you know, it's no accident that that psalm is read during the Jewish feast of tabernacles.

That's called Pentecost. It was on that day that the Holy Spirit filled the followers of Jesus. There's the sound of the mighty rushing wind and dividing tongues of fire appear on each of them.

And what happens immediately after is they start talking about what? The glory of God in languages that are not their own. And I want to say that today in this confirmation service, we are praying for the Holy Spirit to fill each of these young people.

We ask the Holy Spirit, and we are praying together. I'm praying on your behalf and on behalf of the whole diocese of Anak. That God will fill each of these young people so that they will follow him.

[ 21 : 12 ] That their humility before God will make them open to God's voice and his love in them. And that by that Holy Spirit, he would strengthen them by the power of his word to be his ministers in this world.

You know, in their school right now and as they grow up as well. It's an incredibly powerful work that God does over much time. And the thing that I pray for in those services is that this will open their minds and their lips to speak about God's glory that this is all about.

Remember what happened for Peter on that day of Pentecost when he was filled with the Holy Spirit? Is he immediately preached about Jesus and said that God had made Jesus the one crucified to be both Lord and Messiah.

And when people heard this, they were cut to the heart and they said to the people and to others, what must I do? What must I do? They wanted to follow Jesus. They wanted to live for him.

That's the work of the Holy Spirit. It's the power of his word changing hearts as they hear the voice of the Lord. Now, I want to end the sermon because we come to the end of the psalm by the fact that in this storm, not only did we hear the source from heaven of God's word, the effect that it really shakes our lives in the most wonderful, powerful way and sometimes difficult.

[ 22 : 37 ] We also see the goal of God's voice. And this is a very short point because it's very simple. The goal of God's voice is that we would glorify God, that we would glorify Jesus in our lives.

So Jesus, God speaks so that we will see and experience his glory. So verse 9, it's the aftermath of the storm and all the temple cries holy.

They all see that God is enthroned over the flood, the chaos of our life. They all see that he is enthroned as God and king forever, king over sin and death and evil.

So you see, God speaks so that we see the weighty goodness and greatness of God that's far beyond this world. And we are blessed by it forever.

Christ, the king of glory, risen from the dead, is the one we experience in his glory as we love Jesus and follow his powerful voice and reflect his glory as we know that God is our father and we live more and more through him.

[ 23 : 47 ] And the practical outworking, if you look at verse 11, are two things. You get strength. He gives strength to his people from hearing God's word.

And I love the way that's put because the strength comes because I am encouraged by God's word. I am filled with hope by God's word. I am led by God's word in the way I should live.

I am strengthened to serve him. By God's word. And I am deeply aware of God's love for me in God's word. There is a strength in God's word in that way.

It's so true. And he also says God gives his people peace as they hear God's word. And the fundamental peace is the great peace between us and God and our relationships with each other because Jesus accomplished it by the forgiveness of sins.

The word of God gives you the forgiveness of sins. There is deep joy in that. There is a peace that comes in your hearts and in your relationships by knowing the joy of the forgiveness of sins.

[ 24 : 57 ] May God give us grace and give you strength and peace that fills you even in the midst of your darkest fears as you experience and receive the thunder of God's word in your life.

Not only today but in each of the days of the week to come. To God be all glory, honor, praise, thanksgiving forever and ever for he is worthy of all our goodness and our praise.

He is the God of glory. Amen and amen.