When God Speaks

God often "talks to us" in the most unexpected ways. When he does speak in extraordinary ways or at extraordinary times, it's essential that we listen.

Ruth and I were members of Karing Partners, a therapy dog program at the hospital where we volunteered. There were twelve therapy dog teams (a certified therapy dog and their owner) who each visited once or twice a month. My favorite team to work with was Ruth and her twenty-five-pound Havanese, Sophie.

Sadie, my golden retriever, and Sophie worked well together, and people enjoyed seeing the large and small dog walk the halls alongside each other. Sophie was small enough to sit on someone's lap; while sixty-five-pound Sadie, tall enough to place her head in their hand, looked directly into the eyes of those we visited.

On this day, as always, Ruth and I signed in at the Volunteer desk and received our assignment for the day. Then we hurried along, as the dogs eagerly anticipated seeing the people who would give the pets, pats, and words of endearment they knew were forthcoming.

We arrived on the medical floor and stopped at the nurse's station to check on who to visit that day. The charge nurse provided names and room numbers for those she thought might benefit from a visit, and alerted us to a lady who could not speak but was able to hear. The patient had been in the hospital for five days and not spoken a word.

Just as we prepared to get started, that lady walked past escorted by a physical therapist; so, we joined them on their walk down the hall. Knowing the patient could hear, we provided a one-way conversation, talked about our dogs and told her what therapy dogs do, while at the same time encouraged her rehabilitation.

As the therapist assisted her to a chair, Ruth and I said our goodbyes, not expecting a response. We walked away, but stopped suddenly when we heard her shout, *"Bring those dogs back here!"*

We were startled as the nurse told us the patient hadn't spoken since being admitted. We darted back. Ruth placed Sophie on her lap while Sadie stood by her side. The lady proceeded to talk and caress both dogs at once. The nurses and therapists gathered around in awe of her ability to speak. She spoke directly to the dogs and told them how much their being there meant to her. The staff members later told us that the dog's presence and stirring the patient to speak made a world of difference in their ability to care for her.

Ruth and I were familiar with the positive impact our dogs often had on those we visited at the hospital. But we were quite amazed at the effect the dogs had on the medical care for the patient that day.

Likewise, we should be equally amazed at what extremes God goes to in pursuit of us; the unusual ways he grabs our attention and speaks to us. He got Moses' attention by creating a burning bush that wouldn't be consumed. Once Moses was listening, God spoke to him. In another Old Testament story of Balaam the prophet, God spoke through a donkey. God caused the donkey to speak and tell Balaam to change his course of action, to bless the Israelites instead of the curse he planned to put on them.

Only a loving God goes to such great lengths to get our attention in such unexpected ways. We do well to listen when He speaks.

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