7th December 2024

Insight

"God's voice comes to those who will listen for it."

George Bernard Shaw, *Saint Joan*

On my desk is the commentary on Luke's Gospel by Professor William Barclay. Exploring the pre-Nativity narrative in Luke Chapter 1 – where an angel brings news to Zacharias and Elizabeth that they will have a son, who will be John the Baptist – Barclay offers this illustration of the patient devotion of Zacharias, from which we can surely learn.

> In Shaw's play, *Saint Joan*, Joan hears voices from God. The Dauphin is annoyed. "Oh, your voices, your voices," he said. "Why don't your voices come to me? I am the king, not you." "They do come," said Joan, "but you do not hear them. You have not sat in the field in the evening listening for them. When the angelus rings, you cross yourself and have done with it. But if you prayed from your heart and listened to the thrilling of the bells in the air after they stopped ringing, you would hear the voices as well as I do." Joan gave herself the chance to hear God's voice. Zacharias was in the temple waiting for God. God's voice comes to those who listen for it.

It is this kind of illustration, along with personal reflections, historical references, biblical background and accessible language, which still make William Barclay's commentaries my go-to source-material for study and preaching. My dog-eared copies were published in 1953. There have been many up-dated revisions since. But they are always fresh and relevant, and continue to offer me much-needed, wholesome insight and guidance.

Professor William Barclay (or Willie, as he was affectionately known) was a Church of Scotland minister, radio and TV presenter, and Professor of Divinity and Biblical Criticism at Glasgow University from 1963 till his retirement in 1974. His New Testament commentaries and many other books are aimed at ordinary folk, not for academic study, but to assist them in their daily journey of faith and patient devotion: books such as *Ethics in a Permissive Society, The Parables of Jesus, New Testament Words,* along with a unique "New Translation" of the New Testament itself.

Willie Barclay, I take you with me through Advent again. Your writing is a big part of what I have become. Through your insights, I can see more clearly what devotion can mean for me, just as God's servant, Zacharias, did all these centuries ago.

A prayer for today

As I listen for God, I hear His voice through his servant, Willie Barclay. Amen!

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