

“Now Hear the Word of the Lord”

January 14, 2018
1 Samuel 3: 1-10

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“The Lord had not spoken to Samuel before, and Samuel did not recognize the voice. When the Lord called out his name for the third time, Samuel went to the priest Eli for the third time and said,

“Here I am. What do you want?”

Eli finally realized that it was the Lord who was speaking to Samuel. So he said “Go back and lie down. If someone speaks to you again, say ‘Lord, I’m listening. What do you want me to do?’”

When God first spoke to the boy Samuel, things were not good in Israel.

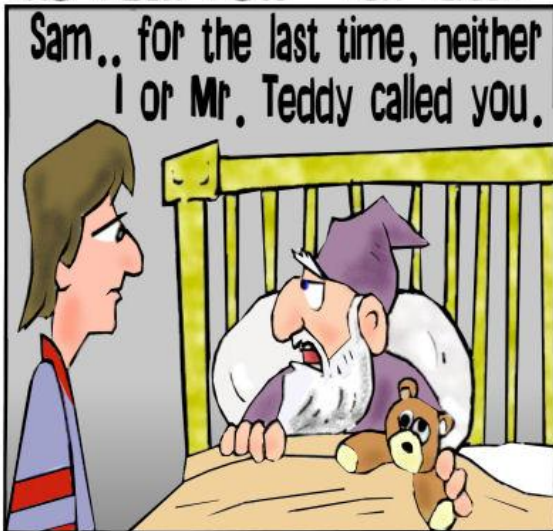
The scripture says that the word of the Lord was rare in those days, and visions were not widespread. We are told that the eyesight of the elderly priest, Eli, was dim. We get the impression that both his physical and his spiritual eyesight were dim.

The text also says that “the lamp of God had not yet gone out.” Likely the oil in the lamp in the temple was low — but you also get the impression that soon, if things did not change, God’s presence would be snuffed out entirely from the people of God. Eli was not an effective priest, and it seems that he did a lousy job of training up the next generation of priests. Maybe he didn’t care, or somehow just didn’t take his responsibility to lead and minister seriously. His sons were worse. They were not just distant from God —it seems they were evil, and rotten to the core.

As a result of this poor spiritual leadership, the people of God were also far from God. They were not in the habit of hearing God speak. Maybe they just weren’t in the habit of listening.

It reminds me of the story of the man who was convinced his wife had a hearing problem. He decided to test it out. So one night, he stood behind her while she was sitting in her chair. He spoke softly to her, "Honey, can you hear me?" There was no response. He moved a little closer and said again, "Honey, can you hear me?" Still, there was no response. Finally, he moved right behind her and said, "Honey, can you hear me?" She replied, "*For the third time, Yes!*"

The Back Pew – Jeff Larson



After a few sleepy chats with Eli.. Samuel realized God was speaking to him. **1 Sam 3**

Samuel heard clearly, and each time he jumped and ran to Eli to ask him what he wanted. Eli, for all of his dozing and ineffectual leadership, *finally* figured out that maybe the Lord was speaking to the boy, and so he told Samuel “If he calls you, you say: ‘Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.’” That tiny piece of advice was likely the best thing Eli had ever done in his entire ministry and life.

We are created for relationship with God, and we are created to shine the light of God. Each one of us has a calling. Callings are not reserved for ministers. We have big

life callings and we have little daily or time and task-specific callings. But if we don’t know how to hear the voice of God, there is no calling at all.

There are so many voices and so many demands on our lives that it is easy to miss that still, small voice — even if you spend all your time in church, as both Eli and Samuel had done — you can still miss it. We have to tune our ears to hear, and we need to be intentional about it.

Time is important. If you don’t schedule time to listen to God, it likely won’t happen. You are more likely to feel connected to God and receive guidance if you make a commitment to come to church and if you make a daily commitment to have a little devotion time. It doesn’t have to be long. Start with 10 minutes.

I’ve mentioned before that I’ve had a time of devotion for many years, but that in the last couple it was a bit more hit and miss. Between work and the family and various colds, I was just feeling too tired to get up. Life was crazy. Last year, at the start of the New Year, I came to that magic place of being *sick and tired of being sick and tired*. (to borrow a phrase from AA!) And I decided that no matter how bad the night was, with sickness or insomnia or whatever, I was going to get up and have a devotion time



before the kids got up for school. I did it (minus maybe a couple of days) for a whole year.

I can tell you, as painful as it was at first, it quickly became my favourite time of the day. The peace, the strength, the clarity I receive in that short time in the morning is hard to overestimate.

Reading the scripture is the best way to hear the voice of God. There are a thousand different devotional materials out there. We have the *Daily Bread* in the racks out in the hall.

THE **WORD**
FOR YOU TODAY
DAILY DEVOTIONAL



We just got a few more copies of *The Word for You Today* devotion books, and you can also get them online:

http://www.ucbcanada.com/joomla2/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=98&Itemid=123

or another that I use is: *Bible in One Year* : <https://www.bibleinoneyear.org/>.

I honestly don't think it matters much what material you use, as long as you read a small passage of scripture and have a chance to think about it and pray about it and say: "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening."

The space can make a difference. Whether it is in the quiet of the early morning in your favourite chair, or on a walk or sitting outside on a bench looking at the river, our environment makes a difference to how we hear or don't hear God's word.

How does the actual 'hearing God's voice' happen? While you are reading a scripture passage or praying or singing a hymn or praise song, look and listen for something that stands out: a word, a thought or an image. When I am looking for direction, I always trust my thoughts more when I am in some way connecting to God. As the hymn we just sang, *Be Thou My Vision*, says "Though my best thought by day or by night." Having a journal nearby when you do read the scripture can help if you jot down a word or thought that jumps out at you. Whatever it was that stood out, stay with that for a little while. Pray about it. If it was a small nudge of direction like a feeling you should call someone, do it, make the call. If it's big piece of direction, like for example to leave your job and go back to school, look for more confirmation. Like Samuel, if it's important, God will keep calling until we get the message.

Now this listening to the voice of God should not be done lightly. Don't do it if you don't want your life to change and if you don't want to do anything to change the world around you.

It can be dangerous to listen. As Marianne Williamson says: "*When you ask God into your life, you think God is going to come into your psychic house, look around, and see you just need a new floor or better furniture, that everything needs just a little cleaning — and so you go along thinking how nice life is when God is there. Then you look out the window one day and you see that there's a wrecking ball outside. It turns out your*

foundation is shot, and that you're going to have to start building it all over from scratch."

Hearing the word of the Lord can be very disruptive. It was for Samuel. I have no doubt that that night he probably wished he had not heard from God. When we start listening, God points out where things need renovating. Israel needed a big reno job starting with Eli and his evil sons. When you connect with God, you risk realizing you need to change, and the world around you needs to change too.

Hearing God speak changes you — and then it begins to change the world around you.

Tomorrow (Monday, January 15th) is Martin Luther King Jr. Day.



Martin Luther King Jr.'s father, grandfather, great-grandfather, brother, and uncle were all preachers. When he became the pastor of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, he probably imagined his life would look like the life of a typical pastor that he knew well. But thank God, King was more interested in

hearing and following the voice of God than he was in maintaining his comfortable lifestyle. The day came when Rosa Parks refused to go to the back of the bus, and Martin found himself in the middle of a boycott. Although he had only been in Montgomery a year and he was only twenty-seven years old, he quickly became a leader of the movement. That night Martin Luther King Jr. met with many of his parishioners and other black people who had had enough of the injustice shown to black people, and there he organized and led a boycott on riding the bus. The Montgomery Bus boycott lasted 381 days.

I don't think that anyone would doubt that Martin Luther King Jr. had a high calling from God. Though it is interesting that in this secular time, King's faith is almost downplayed. And yet it is so clear that he could not have done what he did without his deep faith. You're going to need that connection with the caller if you're going to fulfil the calling.

Following always takes faith, because ***the things that God calls us to are almost never easy***. It certainly wasn't an easy calling for King. Only one month into the Montgomery Bus Boycott, King began receiving nightly phone calls from people threatening to kill his family. He almost quit. He was unable to sleep. Tormented by visions of his only child at that time, his little girl suffering, King one night broke down in his kitchen. As David Garrow writes in his biography of King, at that moment King heard an inner

voice saying, *"Stand up for justice, stand up for truth ... [It was] the voice of Jesus saying still to fight on. He promised never to leave me, never to leave me alone."* From that moment forward, the voice in the kitchen was King's personal anchor.

Lord knows we need people today who are willing to say "Speak Lord, for your servant is listening". Our world needs a major reno job. For all the progress we've made in creating a world with equality, it's astounding how little things seem to have changed. I look south of the border and it seems worse than ever, and it's not too much better here.

For the third year in a row hate crime reports to police have risen and they are increasingly more violent. We know from the swastika spray-painted on Park St. United in Ottawa (because they have a black minister) that racism is alive and well. That's but one issue, one broken piece of a large broken puzzle. We can't do it all. We are so limited and the problems seem so big. But if we listen and trust the voice of God we will find that we are given one small piece to heal, to bring hope and light to, to stand up for justice, stand up for truth.

I pray that you will hear the voice of God. Your calling and my calling likely won't be as huge as Martin Luther King's or even Rosa Park's, but your calling might look something like the thousands of African Americans whose names we don't remember, who chose to walk to work for over a year in Montgomery Alabama in the heat and in the rain, to protest segregation.

Only you can fulfil your calling. No one else can. It is never too late to say "Speak Lord, for your servant is listening". It will change you first, and then it will change the world around you.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

