

1 Samuel 3:1-10

¹Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the Lord under Eli. The word of the Lord was rare in those days; visions were not widespread. ²At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; ³the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the Lord, where the ark of God was. ⁴Then the Lord called, “Samuel! Samuel!” and he said, “Here I am!” ⁵and ran to Eli, and said, “Here I am, for you called me.” But he said, “I did not call; lie down again.” So he went and lay down. ⁶The Lord called again, “Samuel!” Samuel got up and went to Eli, and said, “Here I am, for you called me.” But he said, “I did not call, my son; lie down again.” ⁷Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, and the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him. ⁸The Lord called Samuel again, a third time. And he got up and went to Eli, and said, “Here I am, for you called me.” Then Eli perceived that the Lord was calling the boy. ⁹Therefore Eli said to Samuel, “Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, ‘Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.’” So Samuel went and lay down in his place. ¹⁰Now the Lord came and stood there, calling as before, “Samuel! Samuel!” And Samuel said, “Speak, for your servant is listening.”

John 1:43-51

⁴³The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Follow me.” ⁴⁴Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. ⁴⁵Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth.” ⁴⁶Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.” ⁴⁷When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, “Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!” ⁴⁸Nathanael asked him, “Where did you get to know me?” Jesus answered, “I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.” ⁴⁹Nathanael replied, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” ⁵⁰Jesus answered, “Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these.” ⁵¹And he said to him, “Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.”

Pray: O wondrous God, O loving God, O God who speaks and saves and calls, O God who brings us into a greater understanding, a greater knowledge, a greater purpose, a greater relationship. Speak to us, O Lord. Your servants are listening. Speak your Word of grace, your Word of divine purpose, your Word of discipleship, that we might come to hear and see and experience your redeeming work in this world and in our lives. Amen.

Who is really listening this day? Listening for God’s voice, listening ready and willing to do the Lord’s will?

There’s a story told about Franklin Roosevelt, who would often endure long receiving lines at the White House. He complained that no one really paid any attention to what was said. One day, during a reception, he decided to try an experiment. To each person who passed down the line and shook his hand, he murmured, “I murdered my grandmother this morning.”

The guests responded with phrases like, “Marvelous! Keep up the good work. We are proud of you. God bless you, sir.”

It was not till the end of the line, while greeting the ambassador from Bolivia, that his words were actually heard. Nonplussed, the ambassador leaned over and whispered, “I’m sure she had it coming.”

Are you listening? Really listening? Do you have your eyes open? Really open? That you might see the Lord at work around you? In your life? In your family? In your community and world? Do you feel the presence of God? The comforting grace, the spirit of assurance and peace, the calling to serve, the challenge to follow?

This morning we have two stories of calling. First, we have the Lord speaking to Samuel in the temple, which the confirmation class acted out for us. It is a wondrous, delightful story that tells of the calling of Samuel, a devout and faithful servant of the Lord who eventually anoints both Saul and David as king of Israel. The story not only celebrates that God calls us by name, speaking directly to our hearts, but it also shows the proper response and attitude to God’s movement in our lives: one of humility, service, and surrender.

Samuel, even as a young boy, is so open to the Lord, so willing to put all his trust in God, to be that open vessel with the faith that God will fill it and use it to bring Him glory. “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.” Samuel doesn’t even have the ego to say, “I’m listening,” but understands his role as servant. “Not my will, Lord, but your will be done.”

I think one of the reasons we fail to listen to the Lord this day is because we are too busy thinking **we** have all the answers. We think we are right, build our lives around the idea that we are our own person, that we have to look out for number one. Pride is a sin that is deadly, and it can be so subtle in its enticement, fanning our own egos, seducing us through our own senses and opinions, even tapping into our fears and apprehensions to bring about what **we think** we know is God’s direction.

The word we are talking about here is discernment—discerning the voice of God, and that’s not as easy as it sounds. Thank the Lord that God is still speaking, still active in our world, still working His purposes out, still redeeming and saving and pouring out His grace and forgiveness and love. And God speaks to us as well, personally, intimately, renewing our hearts, encouraging us, forgiving us, giving us the strength to go on, comforting us, empowering us. And God directs, God guides, God leads, but we have to be willing to follow, to put it all on the line and trust in the One who gives us life.

Discernment. How do you hear the voice of God and know it’s Him? How do you calm yourself enough, shutting out the noise of this world so that you can hear the small still voice of the Lord? How do you keep that pride, that self-deception, that sin from getting in the way of truly listening for what God wants you to do?

How does God speak to you? In prayer? In nature? In worship? In the reading and studying of His Word? In our experiences, both the good and the bad? In the love of a spouse or child—love given, love received, the care and comfort of a friend, the encouragement of a coworker, the loving admonishment of something you had been overlooking? Do any of us

actually hear voices? Or is it simple the voice of our conscience that bids us to do the right thing.

You know, when I first started seminary, we went on a kind of orientation retreat, and one of the things we did was to break off in small groups and for each of us to talk about our call to ordained ministry. I found the exercise fascinating, to hear the life experiences of all these different people and what had led them to Eden Seminary. Now, most people, myself included, experienced the actual “calling” to be a kind of nudging. Doors were opened up before us, things happened to us that pointed us in the right way, and through prayer and conversation, we finally decided to search out this “calling” by attending seminary. Certainly, some of the people confessed they thought they were called much earlier in their life, but it was only at this time that they finally listened. Even so, I’ll never forget Clyde; he actually heard a voice. He said he was attending a church service at his home church and was up in the balcony, and then all of a sudden he heard a voice saying, “preach.” He said he was a bit startled, but sure enough it came to him again, “preach.”

Well, at this, you can just imagine the other people in the circle were kind of amazed and curious. I asked Clyde, “Well, what was the voice like? Was it male, female, old, young? Did anyone else hear it or just you?” I’m sad to say, Clyde didn’t have very many answers for us but only to tell us that he knew, somehow, that it was God.

God is still speaking, but are we listening? And how can we know, really know, that what we are hearing is really the voice of our God? Certainly, we can trust in God’s Word as a guide for our faith, looking especially to Jesus Christ—his life and ministry, his teachings, his example, for he asks us to follow in his footsteps. Prayer, the counsel of friends, even our experiences, if we learn from them, for with time comes wisdom, if you have your ears and eyes truly open. And you have to shut out all the noise of this world, all the distractions, all the seducing temptation that knocks you off course, to really listen for God’s voice.

C.S. Lewis put it this way:

The moment you wake up each morning, all your wishes and hopes for the day rush at you like wild animals. And the first job each morning consists in shoving it all back; in listening to that other voice, taking that other point of view, letting that other, larger, stronger, quieter life come flowing in.

“Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.” It’s more than just a response or even a statement of faith. It’s an attitude, a sense of being, a willingness and a trust and an openness and a surrender. It’s one thing to quiet the voices around you, to look at Scripture and prayer and experience and counsel—all these things help, are a necessary part of the discerning process, but what Samuel teaches us this morning is that we have to have the right attitude. “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.” That openness, that humility, that denial of the self, emptying yourself, trusting that God will fill you, speak to you, use you, ready and willing to serve—to serve!

Jesus said it this way, “Let any who wish to become my followers, deny themselves, pick up their cross daily, and follow me.” Today, in the gospel of John, Jesus calls Philip and Nathanael. “Follow me,” he says. Follow me.

I like the gospel, for it moves us from our ears to our eyes, from listening to seeing. It's one thing to feel the nudge of God, to try and discern his voice, but it's quite another to see God's miracles first hand. "Seeing is believing," folks always say. Seeing is believing.

And here's the thing, my friends, the wondrous nature of God, for our Lord does not disappoint us. In Jesus Christ, we see the glory of the Most High revealed—we literally see and witness the Word made flesh in action—in miracles and healings, in his teachings, in his life of service, in the love, the great and wondrous, unconditional love Jesus showed to everyone he met, from prostitutes to tax collectors to beggars and con artists to lepers and Pharisees and even Romans. And we see it, the glory made manifest, in the passion and death of our Lord and in His glorious resurrection.

"Follow me," Jesus says. "Follow me and you will see far greater things," he tells Nathanael. Open your ears, open your eyes, open your very hearts that you may hear and see and trust in our God to use you in His service. "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening." It's more than just a statement of faith, it's an attitude, a yielding of the will, an openness and trust, a surrender, for when you are able to quiet the world around you, when you are able to even quiet the restlessness of your own heart so that you can truly hear God's voice and direction in your life, then you will see something remarkable and wonderful, something miraculous, something that transforms you, changes you, convicting your heart. Then you will see the glory of God revealed in Jesus Christ. Amen.