

**Text: 1 Samuel 3:1-10**

*"The boy Samuel ministered before the LORD under Eli. In those days the word of the LORD was rare; there were not many visions. 2 One night Eli, whose eyes were becoming so weak that he could barely see, was lying down in his usual place. 3 The 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. 4 Then the LORD called Samuel. Samuel answered, "Here I am." 5 And he ran to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." But Eli said, "I did not call; go back and lie down." So he went and lay down. 6 Again the LORD called, "Samuel!" And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." "My son," Eli said, "I did not call; go back and lie down." 7 Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD: The word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him. 8 The LORD called Samuel a third time, and Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." Then Eli realized that the LORD was calling the boy. 9 So Eli told Samuel, "Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place. 10 The LORD came and stood there, calling as at the other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" Then Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening.""*

One bad habit we all have in common is that we don't always listen when we're spoken to.

It happens here in church during the sermon. Standing here about two or three feet above the level of the floor, I can see you. I can see what you're wearing. I can see you when you jab your husband or wife in the ribs to wake him or her up, or remind him or her that the point just made in the sermon applies especially to them. I can see you when your eyes take on that rather blank look, and that you're beginning to think about "what's for dinner" instead of "what's next in the pastor's sermon."

And sometimes it happens at home. Maybe you've heard it. Twenty minutes before bedtime, mother says, "Johnny, put your toys away and go get in the bathtub right now." Johnny heard what she said, why he even uttered an acknowledging "Uh huh". But he wasn't listening. He had no intention of doing what she said because she hadn't yelled at him, called him by his middle name, or said, "This time I really mean it!"

All of us have the bad habit of not listening when we're spoken to. Perhaps this morning we can learn something from the child, Samuel, who, when the Lord spoke to him responded by saying:

**Speak, Lord, I'm Listening!**

Two things we can learn from Samuel is to say when the Lord speaks to us:

- 1. Lord, help me recognize You when You call.**
- 2. Lord, help me respond by doing what You ask.**

**1. Lord, help me recognize You when You call.**

Samuel was the boy his mother Hannah thought she might never have. She was childless for years and had begun to think that she'd never be a mom. It was quite a disgrace for women to be childless and even though her husband loved her and encouraged her, it occasionally brought her to the point of tears. But she prayed. She prayed as hard as she knew how. Listen to the emotion in her prayer. *O LORD Almighty, if you will only look upon your servant's misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the LORD for all the days of his life, and no razor will ever be used on his head. (1 Samuel 1:11)* If God gave a son to her, she would give him back!

God agreed. And nine months later she had a son, and called him Samuel, which means, "Asked for of God." When Samuel was about four or five years old, Hannah kept her promise. She packed his little bag and brought him to the tabernacle and presented him to Eli, the high priest. And, as small as he was, he began serving his Lord by assisting the nearly-blind priest and doing all kinds of odd jobs. Every year his mother and father came to see him, and, every time they came, they brought him new clothes, like any growing boy would need.

By the time Samuel was twelve or so, he was a rather valuable helper to Eli. In the temple, not too far from the holy of holies where the ark of the covenant was kept, there were rooms for the priests and Levites who cared for the tabernacle. One night after Eli had gone to bed and Samuel was in his room about to go to sleep, the Lord called him, *Samuel!* And being the obedient child that he was, he answered, *Here I am.* And he jumped out of bed to see what Eli wanted. When he got to Eli's room and asked him what he wanted, Eli said, "I didn't call you; go back to bed."

Do you think young Samuel was confused? If he wasn't after the first time, he would soon be confused! *Again the LORD called, "Samuel!" And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." "My son," Eli said, "I did not*

*call; go back and lie down." (1 Samuel 3:6) What's going on here? But still once more. The LORD called Samuel a third time, and Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." Then Eli realized that the LORD was calling the boy. 9 So Eli told Samuel, "Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place. (1 Samuel 3:8-9) That's one thing for a veteran priest to say, but what about poor little Samuel? But in the end, it turned out just like old Eli said. The LORD came and stood there, calling as at the other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" Then Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening." (1 Samuel 3:10)*

It's pretty hard to fault Samuel for not answering His Lord the first time he called or even the second or third. In fact, if I had been Samuel, I would have been scared to answer the fourth time. The Bible tells us there *weren't many visions in those days*. God had not spoken directly to His people for a long time. There hadn't been a prophet in 400 years, not since Moses. No wonder Samuel didn't recognize God when he called!

The sad part of the story is that the very person – the mentor – who told Samuel what to do in this unfamiliar situation didn't practice what he preached. Eli had two sons who were making a mockery of the priesthood and were living sexually immoral lives. These young men needed badly to hear what God had to say to them. And they needed to hear it from their father. But like the mother who has to say, "This time I really mean it!", Eli's words – God's Word – fell on deaf ears, and God pronounced judgment on the whole family.

I'd like to think that if God called us the same way He called Samuel, He would excuse us for not recognizing Him. When was the last time you sat up in bed in the middle of the night and said, "**Speak, Lord, I'm Listening,**" because you heard God's voice coming from the closet? God doesn't call to people from closets. He doesn't speak to us in visions, or from an ark of the covenant. He doesn't tap us on the shoulder when we're walking in the dark from the garage to the house, or speak to us through the speakers of our stereo when the amplifier is turned off.

Instead, He's chosen to speak to us in the most beautiful way I can think of. He's chosen to talk to us through the Bible. And in the Bible, which we call God's Word, He tells us everything we need to know about ourselves, about him, about his plan for us and how we fit into that plan.

And God asks us to listen when He speaks. But a thousand other voices are calling to us from the world around us. Those voices tell us to follow the examples we find on TV, in movies, on the internet and in magazines. Those other voices speak eloquently, appeal to what the majority is doing and sound awfully convincing. They speak to us and to our families. Those voices sound sweet, rational and oh-so inviting. Sometimes we listen. And sometimes we do what they say! But know that Satan is an accomplished ventriloquist! He can disguise his voice. He can make it sound like someone cute and sweet and credible is speaking. But it's really him! Eli's sons followed that voice. A lot of people in our world follow that voice and there's a constant danger that we can be deceived by Satan's ruse. And when we listen to him, we plug our ears and sing "la la la" so we don't hear a thing God says.

But listen carefully! Through that noise God is still speaking to me. He says, "David, David, remember I created you." He says, "David, don't you know what a dangerous situation you are in because you are a "chip off the old block" of your first parents? He says to me, "Friend, you are helpless dealing with sin by yourself." But then God's voice of warning becomes the sweet whisper of his grace. "David, don't you know that Jesus loved you enough to sacrifice himself on Calvary to pay for your sins? Do you remember that Jesus has prepared a heavenly mansion for you?" He says, "David, my Spirit does what he is supposed to do in your life through the Word and the Sacraments – he calls you to faith, keeps you in faith, and enlightens you with his gifts." And he says to me, "David, I have a plan for you until it's time to go to heaven. I want you to be like my disciple Philip and tell the other people in your life to "*Come and see!*" God still speaks to me. And God still speaks to you. He speaks through His Word.

Right here is where you and I can learn a lesson from this twelve year old boy. As God speaks to us through His Word, you and I are moved by his Spirit to say "**Speak Lord, I'm Listening!**" We pray, **Lord, help me recognize You when you call.**

## **2. Lord, help me respond by doing what You ask.**

Just listening to our Lord as He speaks to us through His Word, however, is not enough. God doesn't call on us to let his message go in one ear and out the other. Our love for Him should move us to want to do what He says. Jesus once said, "*Blessed . . . are those who hear the word of God and obey it.*" (Luke 11:28) We need to pray to Him: "**Lord, help me respond by doing what You ask.**"

Can you imagine how difficult a task it was that God was asking of Samuel? This was his mentor – a father figure – God's

priest! In the next few verses God is asking Samuel to bring a message to the old priest that God himself says, *“will make the ears of everyone who hears it tingle.”* He was to take to Eli the message that he had failed as a father and because of it, God’s judgment was coming on his entire household.

It wasn’t easy for a twelve year old to tell the highest official in the land that he and his sons were going to die. But then, there are lots of things God tells us in His Word that aren’t easy. For example, He says, *“Flee from sexual immorality!”* He says, when you go to bed with someone who’s not your wife or husband, you become one with that person. He says, *“All other sins a man commits are outside the body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body.”* He says, *“Don’t you know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price, Therefore honor God with your body.”*

That’s not easy to do that with all those voices talking in our ear. It’s not easy to stand morally straight today. It’s not easy being the only virgin left in your class. It’s not easy turning off the R rated movie on your HBO. It’s not always easy being faithful to your marriage partner. It’s not always easy to do what God asks!

But then, He’s never said it would be! What He does say is that He will be with us. He says, *“Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”* (Isaiah 41:10) He says, *“I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you.”* (Psalms 32:8) And when we stumble and fall He says, *“Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine.”* (Isaiah 43:1)

The Bible tells us what God has done. So how do we know what God wants? How do we know what he wants for our congregation? Some of us, including me, might act like, at times, we have all of the answers to the questions, all of the solutions to the challenges that are our future. Let me be the first to tell you. We don’t have all of the answers. But God does. He knows best what we need. He knows what we should be doing. He knows the things for which we should be praying. He knows, and he has even told us. But we need to listen. We need to listen and hear that still, small voice of God in the Words of Scripture that proclaim and instruct and direct and lead.

It’s not always easy to listen when we’re spoken to. Children don’t always listen when their parents talk to them. Husbands don’t always listen to their wives or wives listen to their husbands. Those in the pews don’t always listen to the sermon, and the pastor doesn’t always listen to the people in the pew. God would be pleased, however, if this morning we learned a lesson from twelve year old Samuel. God would be pleased if we would listen when He speaks, if when He talks to us through His Word we would say, **Speak, Lord, I’m Listening**, if we would pray to Him, **Lord help me recognize You when You speak, and help me respond by doing what you ask.**

Sometimes we can learn an important lesson from a child!

**Amen.**