

August 11, 2019
9th Sunday after Pentecost
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church
Listen to the Voice of God

1 Samuel 3:1–10 (NIV84)

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."

Dear Friends in Christ,

His two sons were in training to take over the family business. Their father was old and losing his ability to lead. The boys became corrupt. They used their positions to steal from men and abuse women. Their father tried to get them to stop but they would not listen to their father, who was the high priest of Israel. The father is Eli from our portion of Scripture this morning. His wicked sons who would not listen to their father or to God were named Hophni and Phinehas. These two had a great excuse for not listening to God. Their life was good. They had the best food, stolen from the sacrifices people brought to the temple. They had women. They had power over the people who had to go through them to get to God. Why change a good thing by listening to the Lord?

In our account for today, the Lord chooses a new spiritual leader to guide Israel after Eli dies. The Lord chooses a man, only a boy now, who will listen to the Lord. This morning we will examine some of the common excuses people make for not listening to the voice of God. Then we will rejoice in the many ways we can still hear the voice of God today.

Our Excuses

The Scripture before us from 1 Samuel 3 contains these two interesting observations: *The boy Samuel ministered before the LORD under Eli. In those days the word of the LORD was rare; there were not many visions.....Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD: The word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him.*

Direct communication from the Lord is a rare thing. It is rare throughout the Old and New Testament except for brief times when the Lord chooses to communicate directly with someone, a prophet. The young boy, Samuel, does not seek out this encounter with the Lord. He thinks that Eli is calling him to

help with some task at the tabernacle. The Lord initiates the direct conversation with Samuel. The same is true for Moses before this. He did not go into the wilderness to have a spiritual experience. The Lord called to him from the burning bush. The same is true for Noah and Abraham and Elijah and Elisha and the rest who heard the voice of God directly.

If anyone tells you that they know the secret of hearing God's voice directly, warning bells should be going off in your head. If someone uses phrases like, "God told me...God laid this plan on my heart...God gave me this dream...I can feel God's answer to my prayers" there should be warning bells going off. The Lord has not promised to speak directly to anyone. He has not promised to speak to us by giving us a good feeling about something or goosebumps or dreams.

What happens to Samuel is a very rare event when the Lord chose to speak directly to a sinful human. Instead of looking for the rare and unexpected direct communication from the voice of God, we look to his written word, the Bible. Isaiah told his people this many years ago: "To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn." (Isaiah 8:20). We have the written law and testimony of the Lord in the inspired, inerrant, infallible, unchanging 66 books of the Old and New Testaments. As I talk about listening to the voice of God, I will mean to listen to what God has clearly communicated in his written Word.

But we have excuses for not listening to God's Word today. Maybe we tell ourselves that we don't have time to read or listen to the Scriptures. But time is not the real problem, priority is the issue. In the Gospel of Luke we heard about Jesus' visit to the home of Mary and Martha. Both sisters had the same amount of time with Jesus in the house. Martha chose to be busy serving Jesus while Mary chose to listen to Jesus. Martha was doing good things. Maybe cooking, cleaning, making up a bed so Jesus can get some rest and recover his physical strength. But she was so busy doing good that she was missing out on the voice of God in her own home.

We can also become busy with doing many good things. You help your neighbor, volunteer in the community, feed your family, go to school, serve your employer well, help with school activities, volunteer at church, and so much more. Keep doing these good things to serve God and your neighbor. But don't let being busy be an excuse for not listening to the voice of God. Be like Mary and Samuel and eagerly make time to listen to Jesus in his Word.

Another reason a Christian may not want to listen to the voice of God is that they don't want to change their life. God's commandments are very clear. If someone knows that God calls what they are doing sin, they might choose to ignore or close their ears to God for a time because they don't want to stop or don't think they can stop sinning in some way. God says things in his Word that our sinful nature does not like. If you always like what God tells you, you might not be listening very closely. For the Lord tells everyone here that we all continue to sin against him, even if we have been a Christian for decades. Closing one's ears to God's call to repentance puts your soul in eternal danger. Listen to the voice of God in his law and repent each day.

One of the online devotions from WELS.net this week gave an example of another reason Christians may not listen to the voice of God often: "Of all the spiritual scams, perhaps the most dangerous one is

this: The notion that even if it's been years since you've studied God's Word in any serious way, that you're just too strong of a Christian ever to be deceived." (WELS.net Daily Devotion for 8/8/19). I was baptized by Pastor so and so and confirmed by Pastor what's his name so I'm strong enough in faith to face anything. I'm too strong to get hooked on pornography. I'm too strong to be influenced by the arguments of secular atheists. I'm so strong that I can skip some Sundays. I'm strong enough that I only need Communion once in a while. But only one man was strong enough to not need to listen to God often and Christ still listened to his Father often. Don't fall for the deception of the devil that you are too strong to need the Word of God often in your life.

God's Voice Today

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."

Sometimes I think it would be amazing to be like Samuel and hear the voice of God directly. But the more I think about it, the more I am convinced that we have it better than Samuel. He was confused when God first spoke to him, and the second time and the third. The Word of God was rare. Not many heard it and not many could read it. But today the Word of God is easy to find. We have the Word in printed form in our Bible books. We have the Word of God in electronic form on websites like Biblegateway.com and in apps. We have the Bible in audio forms from cassette tapes to digital audio downloads.

We have it better than Samuel, not only in the ways we can listen to the voice of God but in what is written. Samuel lived at the end of the time of the judges, just before the first king of Israel, Saul. Many prophets were still unborn who would speak the promises of the Savior to come. It would be centuries before the Savior himself would be born. But we have the complete record of the promises and the fulfillment. The voice of God speaks to us in the Gospel of John and tells us that the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have One who is better than Moses and Samuel and all the other prophets. The Son of God, God from God and light from light, came to this earth and spoke directly to sinful people. We have his words recorded in the Gospels, the very words from the Word made flesh.

Christ says: "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." (Luke 5:31-32). Jesus came for me and for you and for all who have sinned by neglecting to listen to him.

And he tells us: "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. (Luke 12:32).

And when we are burdened with sin and sorrow in life, the voice of God comes to us through this word of Christ: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. (Matthew 11:28).

He tells repentant sinners who come to the table for Communion: "Drink from it, all of you. This is my

blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.” (Matthew 26:27-28).

And when death is near, our Lord speaks to us and says: “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; ²⁶ and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.” (John 11:25-26).

We have it better than Samuel for we have all the promises of Jesus, who once was dead but is alive forever and ever. Therefore, keep listening to the voice of your Savior in his Word. Growing in faith does not happen instantly. Samuel was not a mature prophet of the Lord when he first heard the voice of God in our account today. He continued to listen and learn from the word of the Lord. One Bible passage may not fix everything immediately. However, a steady diet of God’s Word, day after day and year after year will produce a stronger faith in Christ, the Word made flesh. Listen to the voice of God.

Amen.