

## 1 Samuel 3:1-10

January 14, 2017; Epiphany 2

The story is told of Franklin Roosevelt, who often endured long receiving lines at the White House greeting guests. His top complaint was that no one really paid any attention to what he said in those lines. So one day, during a reception, he decided to try an experiment. To each person, who passed down the line and shook his hand, he said softly: *"I murdered my grandmother this morning."* President Roosevelt quickly found out that he was right that no one was really listening. The guests responded with phrases like: *"Marvelous!;" "Keep up the good work!;" "We are proud of you!;" "God bless you sir."* It was not until at the end of the line, while greeting the ambassador from Bolivia, that his words were actually heard. Puzzled, the ambassador leaned over and whispered, *"I'm sure she had it coming."*

Are you a good listener? Listening is something that we have to work at, isn't it? Studies have shown that even as much as 45% of communication is accounted for by listening. That means that almost half of our communication with each other is listening. That's hard for most people. We like to talk. Even when we trying to listen, do we listen to each word, to each tone, each emotion that the other person is expressing? Or are we just using that time to put together the next sentence that we want to say?

Sometimes it is our own fault that we don't hear what someone is trying to tell us. We just simply don't pay attention. Is it because the attention span of people has shrunk? Is it that people are too quick to speak and butt into the conversation before they have listened? Is it because we are distracted by technology? Are we distracted because we have too much information at our finger tips? Is it because we are just simply impatient? I think, there are all kinds of reasons for not listening.

When people don't listen, there are all kinds of bad things that can and often do happen. Maybe you saw the report on TV from about a week and a half ago about the 11 year old girl that was killed in Florida by a train because she was so distracted by looking down at her phone. Marriages get into trouble because husband and wife have stopped listening to each other. Instead of trying to encourage each other, they each want to get the last word in. Think what happens when we use words that are destructive instead of constructive. We use words to hurt others because we are just mad at them. And so, we use words to hurt. Think of what happens when we open our mouths to speak before we have really listened to someone else. Think what happens when we are quick to blame instead of asking ourselves if we are to blame as well.

The children of Israel had stopped listening to God. They were being distracted by all the things that were going on around them. It had been going on for some time before Samuel was even born. Our text tells us: **"In those days the word of the Lord was rare; there were not many visions."** God had stopped speaking to his people because they had stopped listening to him. Things were about to change. God was once again going to speak. He knew that people needed to hear his voice.

That started with Samuel. Samuel had not yet heard God, but God had heard Samuel's mother just a few years back. Hannah had been childless. As the Bible describes, God had closed Hannah's womb, and she could not bear a child. But Hannah really wanted one, so one year she poured out her heart to God in prayer near the tabernacle. She prayed a bold thing. Not only for a child, but specifically for a son. And if the Lord would grant her that son, she promised that she would give the son back to the Lord so he could serve the Lord full time for all the days of his life. Bold prayer, huh?

Think God heard? He sure did! He listened to Hannah's prayer and answered it. The answer to Hannah's prayer was a baby boy. Hannah named her baby boy Samuel, because in Hebrew, Samuel means *"God listened. God heard."* Hannah kept her promise. After she had weaned her son, she brought him back to the tabernacle, and gave him to God. The high priest and mentor of Samuel was the high priest whose name was Eli.

You may have heard this story read before. The details are clear enough. The Lord called out to Samuel, who was still a young boy, in the middle of the night. Thinking it was Eli who was calling, Samuel runs into Eli's room. After running into his room three times, Eli figured out what was happening. He tells the young boy: **"Go and lie down, and if he calls you,**

say, **“Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.”**” The Lord calls again and Samuel replies: **“Speak, for your servant is listening.”**”

What did the Lord speak? The Lord says to Samuel: *All right Samuel. Now that you are listening... Here it comes. I'm done with Eli. I'm done with his family. The priesthood will no longer be in his family line. To prove it, Eli's boys are going to die because they are wicked. And Eli would eventually die too.* I don't imagine Samuel getting much sleep that night. When Eli got up in the morning, he asks Samuel what the Lord had to say. Imagine this little boy standing before the high priest and telling him that his sons are going to die because of their wickedness.

Want to know what Eli says after Samuel tells him all that was going to happen? **“He is the Lord; let him do what is good in his eyes.”** (vs. 18) Wow. The Lord will do what is best. Even for a man who wasn't not a very good listener for much of his life, God still brought the Word to him. He wanted Eli to know that He was still there for him.

God wants you to know the same. His Word still cuts to the heart. God sees all that ugliness of sin that is in your heart. Yet, what does he do? He takes you to the cross. He says to you: Take heart your sins are forgiven. He wants your heart. He wants to take all that anger, all that hate, all that resentfulness, all that sin, all those destructive words and thoughts out of your heart. Your sins are forgiven because Jesus died for you. You have peace. You have healing. We are saved. We have eternal life in Jesus. And any God who would do that for us is a God that is worth listening to. May we all join in saying these words of Samuel: **“Speak, for your servant is listening.”** Amen.