

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church  
Shobnier, Illinois  
Epiphany 2B  
January 17, 2021  
1 Samuel 3:1-20; 1 Corinthians 6:12-20; John 1:43-51

### God Still Speaks - Are You Listening?

And the LORD came and stood, calling as at other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant hears." (1 Samuel 3:10 ESV)

In the Name of Jesus, the only Savior of the world.

"Can you hear me now?" The question is asked today not about cell phones, but God's Word. For the question is not about the act of sound vibrating on the ear drum, but about recognizing and understanding what that sound says and means. It's not so much about being able to hear, as it is about listening. God grant that we would gladly answer the question with a resounding, "Yes!"

The Word of the Lord is hard to hear, especially when you haven't heard it before. That's why Samuel didn't know it was the Lord who was calling to him. Despite having served under Eli the priest for some time, "Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him." How could this be? How could Samuel serve under a priest before the ark of the Lord and still not know the Lord? What did Eli teach him? Apparently not what he should have taught him.

So when the Lord calls to Samuel, he thinks Eli is calling him. And it took Eli three times to figure out that it was the Lord calling Samuel. But once he does, he tells Samuel that the next time the Lord calls, and Eli is certain that He will, he should say, "Speak, LORD, for your servant hears." What wonderful words! Oh, that they were on our hearts and lips every day. "Speak, LORD, for your servant hears."

Yet, if we do listen to the Lord, we may hear things we don't really want to hear. Samuel is told that the message he is given would make the "ears of everyone who hears it . . . tingle." (1 Sam. 3:11). It was not going to be good news, for it was judgment on the house of Eli. Eli's sons, who also served before the Lord, were scoundrels, "worthless men." They were wicked and evil and "treated the offering of the LORD with contempt." (1 Sam. 2:17). Once, when Eli was old, he rebuked them, telling them they shouldn't do what they did, even warning them, "'If someone sins against a man, God will mediate for him, but if someone sins against the LORD, who can intercede for him?' But they would not listen to the voice of their father." (1 Sam. 2:25). So God was going to judge Eli and his family. "I declare to him that I am about to punish his house forever, for the iniquity that he knew, because his sons were blaspheming God, and he did not restrain them. Therefore I swear to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be atoned for by sacrifice or offering forever." (1 Sam. 3:13-14).

This is the message that God gives to Samuel. And the next morning, Eli encourages Samuel to tell him what God had said. Of course, Samuel doesn't really want to tell him. But, to his credit, Eli says, "Do not hide it from me. May God do so to you and more also if you hide anything from me of all that he told you." So Samuel told him everything and hid nothing from him. And he [Eli] said, 'It is the LORD. Let him do what seems good to him.'" (1 Sam. 3:17-18). Despite his failures and faults, Eli was still willing to listen to the Word of the Lord.

Are we? Are we willing to listen to the Word of the Lord? Do we know it when we hear it? Or are we like Samuel who at first didn't know the Lord? Do we go to church, even work in the church, but don't hear the Word of the Lord? Do we only listen when it's good news, or when it agrees with us? Do our ears tingle? Or do we just want our itching ears scratched? Everything God tells us in His Word is important for us to hear. But will we listen? And what do we do with that Word once we've heard it?

In today's Epistle, St. Paul delivers a Word which makes our ears tingle, doesn't he? He tells us to flee sexual immorality, to run away from fornication. Through Paul, God tells us to be chaste and pure in our bodies. Though we don't want to hear it, he here condemns all sexual activity outside of godly marriage between one man and one woman for life. Sexual activity outside of marriage, whatever form it takes, is sin. That includes all sexual activity before and outside marriage, adultery, homosexuality, and pornography in all forms – in words, in pictures, in print, in digital form (internet). All such thoughts and activity is sin against God, your spouse, and yourself. And the reason it's so serious is that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. "You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body." (1 Cor. 6:19-20).

Yes, the Word of the Lord is hard to hear, especially when it attacks our pet sins and idolatry. But it is still God's Word and we are well served to listen to it – even when it is hard.

But God's Word is certainly not ALL hard to hear. For it also proclaims a Word of grace and forgiveness and life for those who repent. That's what happened in today's Gospel. Philip heard Jesus' call to follow Him and he did. Jesus had sought him as a shepherd looks for a lost sheep. And with such joy over being found by His Savior, Philip finds Nathanael and tells him, "We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." (John 1:45). You see, Philip had heard the Word of the Lord. And when the Word made flesh called him to follow, he did. And he couldn't keep it to himself.

Now when Philip tells Nathanael that WE have found the Messiah, he's not really accurate. For it was Jesus who had found Philip. Still, this was good news. It had to be told. But Nathanael too had heard the Word of the Lord. That's why he responded as he did, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Indeed, God's Word nowhere spoke of the Messiah coming from Nazareth. It said He would come from Bethlehem. Thus Nathanael's response. Did Philip really know what he was saying?

But Philip would not be put off. Instead of debating Nathanael whether anything good could come from Nazareth, he simply said, “Come and see.” That’s the best kind of evangelism. Tell someone you know that you know Jesus. And when they raise questions you can’t answer, don’t argue. Simply say, “Come and see.” Come to see Jesus – right here at Immanuel Lutheran Church in Augsburg. For His Word is still being preached and heard here. His Word still calls us to repentance. His Word still calls us to be His disciples, to follow Him, to hear Him.

And when we know our Lord, when we listen to the voice of our Shepherd, we hear great news, even as Nathanael did. For when Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said, “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!” And when Jesus told him, “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you,” that was it! Jesus was revealed to Nathanael, not because of what Philip had said, but because Jesus had shown Himself to be the Son of God. And Nathanael confessed, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” Jesus is the One promised by Moses. Jesus is the Son of God. Jesus is the King of Israel who would be crowned with thorns and enthroned on a cross.

And this is all for you. You who God has sought and found. You who God has made His own dear child in Baptism. You for whom the Lord Jesus shed His holy blood to atone for your sins and purchase your redemption. You for whom He is risen again and lives and reigns to all eternity. You who He still calls to follow Him, to be His disciple, to live a life of repentance. You to whom He gives His very Body and Blood as the pledge and token of His never-ending love for you. You to whom He has given the joy of telling others of the great forgiveness and life He gives to you. You may not have seen “heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man,” but you have seen His Body and Blood given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. You have heard Him say, “I forgive you all your sins.”

Yes, God is still speaking. God grant that we all hear Him, take His Word to heart, repent of our sins, receive His forgiveness, and rejoice in His salvation. Oh, and yes, be sure to tell others so they too can rejoice with you. To God be the glory now and forever. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

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