

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church  
Shobonier, Illinois  
Epiphany 2B  
January 14, 2024  
1 Samuel 3:1-20; John 1:43-51

Listen! God Is Calling

And the LORD came and stood, calling as at other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant hears." . . . 19 And Samuel grew, and the LORD was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground. (1 Samuel 3:10, 19 ESV)

Dearly Beloved in Christ:

We live in an age much like that of Israel at the time of Samuel, when "everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25). Very few people want to listen to the Word of the Lord, or do. In fact, there are many who, in going their own way, are trying to silence Him. Yet, God has not stopped speaking. He has not remained silent or withheld His Word. He is still calling, if only we would listen.

You see, we are by nature "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1) and our ears are stopped. So, if God doesn't open our ears, we \*couldn't\* hear Him. And this is just what He does. He comes to us and opens our ears to hear His Word. Still, because of our sinful nature, we don't always want to hear Him. Oftentimes, we would rather listen to the devil, the world around us, or even to our own sinful desires. Because we are sinners deserving nothing but God's wrath and punishment, we would rather hide from God, or at least cover our ears and pretend we don't hear Him. We are afraid of what we might hear. We're afraid that we'll hear what we should be doing but aren't or that we should stop doing something we enjoy. We would rather do what we want than do what God wants us to do.

Yet, God continues to call. Do we hear Him? Samuel hadn't heard God's voice so He didn't know what it sounded like. When God came to him and called him, Samuel thought it was Eli who was calling. Even Eli didn't know at first what was going on because he too had not heard God's voice, though he was a priest. But when Samuel went to Eli the third time, it finally dawned on Eli what was happening. He figured out that Samuel was hearing the voice of God. So he directed Samuel to answer "Speak, LORD, for Your servant hears." Indeed, this is the only appropriate answer to God's call. So, Samuel went back to bed. "Then the LORD came and stood and called as at the other times, 'Samuel! Samuel!'" And how did Samuel answer? "Speak, for Your servant hears." Samuel had listened to Eli and answered as Eli had directed. He was now ready to listen to what God had to say to him.

And as we read about the rest of Samuel's life, we find that his was no idle response. He didn't just say "Speak, for Your servant hears" and then go on his merry way, letting that Word go in one ear and out the other. Instead, having been called by God to be His prophet, Samuel lived a life of constant readiness to listen to God's Word and he "let none of his words fall to the ground." By His grace, God had chosen to reveal Himself to Israel, and He had chosen Samuel as His servant through whom He would speak. Rather than leave Israel on her downward spiral, God broke through to call them to repentance and faith.

The situation wasn't much different when Jesus walked on the earth. There had been no revelation of God for four hundred years, though they did have the Old Testament. God had not raised up a prophet until John "came preaching and baptizing in the area of the Jordan." Israel had fallen on the hardest of times as they had come under the control of the Romans. Their past glory was but a distant memory. And it was into such a world that God once again broke through. And as He did, He found few willing to listen. In today's Gospel reading (John 1:43-51), Jesus called Philip to follow Him. And by that Word, Philip did.

Indeed, God, who in the past had spoken by His prophets, was now speaking through His Son (Heb. 1:1-2). God Himself had come and stood in the midst of His people. And as He called those first disciples, we find that at least one of them, while willing to listen to God, doubted that Jesus was the Messiah. Nathanael knew that the Scripture had said the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, but nothing about His coming from Nazareth. That's why he asked, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" He wasn't sure Philip knew what he was talking about. And yet, Jesus was patient with Nathanael just as God was patient with Samuel. He didn't scold Nathanael. Rather, He praised him for holding to the Word and trusting in its promises. And when Jesus revealed Himself to Nathanael, Nathanael responded in a manner similar to that of Samuel, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" Not the same words as Samuel, but certainly the same thought. God had revealed Himself, faith was created, and Nathanael was ready to listen.

The Messiah promised in the Old Testament had come. God had come in the flesh and appeared to Israel. Through His life and death, through His words and deeds, Jesus revealed that He was the Savior the world had been waiting for. His perfect life and His perfect death spoke to a world so in need of Good News. The Holy One of God spoke to a world in need of forgiveness of their sins.

So it is that God continues to call to us today. Occasionally He'll get our attention with a natural disaster or some other event such as this extreme cold. At such times we search for the meaning behind the event. But there is no clear Word of God there. Yet, such times should lead us to repentance and drive us to our Lord begging for mercy and asking for grace to serve others. As is most often the case, God calls us through His Word and Sacraments. Indeed, God called us by name when we were Baptized and made us His children. He has revealed Himself

to us as a good and gracious God. He calls us to repentance through the preaching of His holy Law. He calls us to saving faith through the preaching of His Gospel. Yes, He is always ready to forgive us our sins for the sake of His Son who gave His life "for us and for salvation."

But we aren't always good listeners, are we? We would rather \*tell\* God what \*we\* want instead of listening to His Word to hear what He wants for us. Listening to God is hard work because He will sometimes tell us things we would rather not hear. In His Word He tells us that we are sinners who deserve nothing but His punishment. Then, when we realize our true condition, our utter helplessness, He tells us that He loves us. He tells us that He sent His Son to be Man and that He suffered the same trials, tribulations, and temptations as we do. He tells us that He accepted His Son and His death on the cross as full atonement for our sins. He tells us that He forgives us all our sins. He tells us that His Son is preparing a place for us, right now. He tells us that His Son is interceding for us and on our behalf. He tells us that His Son will return to take all believers to live with Him forever in heaven.

Yes, God continues to call. He continues to speak to us "wonderful words of life." He continues to be patient with us as He persistently calls each one of us personally to repentance and faith in His beloved Son. God grant you such faith to hear Him and to respond with Samuel, "Speak, for Your servant hears." And then as you hear, listen. Listen closely as He speaks to you and believe His loving words, "I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Amen.

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

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