

**“You Called?”
1 Samuel 3:1-11
January 14, 2018
Holiday Island Presbyterian Church**

INTRODUCTION:

**At the time this all was happening,
Israel had once again grown complacent
And “the word of the LORD was rare”**

**For a nation – and a people – who were especially called by God
to be and do great things,
the times are as dark as the night in this passage.**

**Eli was serving as a priest at the Shiloh sanctuary,
where the ark of the covenant was kept.**

**Samuel had been enrolled
in something similar to a boarding school
where he’d learn Hebrew and study the Word of God
he was about 11 years old.**

**He had been studying about God, the record indicates,
but he did not yet know God:
the Word of the Lord was not something
he perceived or discerned.**

**In other words,
Samuel had “head” knowledge “about” God
but no “heart” experience “with” God.**

**Samuel, is bedded down in the temple with the ark of the covenant
while Eli slept in another room.**

**The boy hears a voice calling him by name
and three times he thinks it must be Eli who has called
he goes to Eli to ask what he wants.**

**Meanwhile, because we are observing the story from outside,
we know that it is God calling the boy;
because Samuel does not yet know God's voice.**

**Even Eli does not understand what is happening right away.
Eventually, however, Eli suspects it might be God calling
and he tells the boy to answer the Lord.**

There are several things we can observe about this encounter.

FIRST OBSERVATION: LISTENING

**The first observation is we will never hear God
if we are not listening to God.**

Let me give you an example:

Two psychiatrists meet at their 20th college reunion.

One is vibrant, while the other looks withered and worried.

"So what's your secret?" the weary looking psychiatrist asks.

**"Listening to other people's problems every day, all day long,
for years on end,
has made an old man of me."**

The vibrant psychiatrist replies:

"So, who listens?"

**At some point in seminary and as I was serving my first church,
I became convinced that pastors sometimes don't listen.
So I started mocking them.**

**When people would greet me,
I would ask, “How are you?”
No matter what they said, I would reply:
“I’m sorry to hear that. I hope you get better soon.”**

You’ve probably heard me say that.

**Often the question is not whether God is speaking,
but whether we are still enough and quiet enough to hear.**

**Jesus assures us that God always listens to us,
but do we really listen to God?**

Hearing God’s voice requires silence. . . and practice.

**Notice that Samuel was “lying down” or resting
when he heard from the Lord.**

He was quiet and his surroundings were calm, peaceful.

Illustration:

**“Before refrigerators, people used icehouses
Where you could buy ice to preserve their food.**

Icehouses had thick walls, no windows and a tightly fitted door.

**In winter, when streams and lakes were frozen,
large blocks of ice were cut, hauled to the icehouses
and covered with sawdust.**

Often the ice would last well into the summer.

**One man lost a valuable watch while working in an icehouse.
He searched diligently for it,
carefully raking through the sawdust, but didn’t find it.**

His fellow workers also looked, but their efforts, too, proved futile.

**A small boy who heard about the fruitless search
slipped into the icehouse during the noon hour
and soon emerged with the watch.**

Amazed, the men asked him how he found it.

**I closed the door,” the boy replied, “lay down in the sawdust,
and kept very still.**

Soon I heard the watch ticking.”

**Great things happen when we learn to listen
For the “still small voice of God.”**

The main reason we don't listen?

Interruptions!

Interruptions define our lives.

**Our days and nights are full of gadgets that ping, buzz and beep
demanding our immediate attention,
taking us away from whatever we are doing.**

**Our brains focus quickly on one topic,
then switch to another, and another.**

It's like we are constantly on overload.

Another form of “not listening”

is that we simply don't expect God to speak to us.

So, like Samuel, we attribute what we hear to a human voice.

SECOND OBSERVATION: INTERPRETATION

A second observation from our passage today

is that when we are beginning to listen to God's call to us

**we often need the help of Christian friends, mentors,
pastors and preachers.**

**Sometimes, when God can't get our attention
by speaking to us directly,
God will use an object lesson.**

**God will open the eyes of our understanding and show us something
that pierces the interruptions and busyness of our lives.**

**It may be a person in need,
Or an act of kindness
Or a thought generated by the book we are reading.
Or a door we open to God**

**We make a commitment to do the right thing
--and before we know it
God's voice is booming in our hearts and minds.**

**Eli perceived that the Lord was calling the boy
and gave Samuel valuable counsel.**

Samuel needed Eli to explain to him what these stirrings mean.

**It often takes others in our lives to aid us
in understanding the call God places before us.**

Illustration:

**One day an old man was casually walking along a country lane
with his dog and his mule.**

**Suddenly a speeding pick-up truck careened around the corner,
knocking the man, his mule, and his dog into the ditch.**

The old man decided to sue the driver of the truck,

seeking to recoup the cost of the damages.

**While the old man was on the stand,
the counsel for the defense cross-examined the man.**

**"I want you to answer 'yes' or 'no' to the following question:
Did you or did you not say at the time of the accident
that you were 'perfectly fine'?"**

**And the man said, "Well, me and my dog and my mule
were walking along the road ... "**

**And the counsel for defense said,
"Stop, stop, I asked you, tell me 'yes' or 'no',
did you say you were 'perfectly fine'
at the time of the accident?"**

**"Well, me and my dog and my mule
were walking along the road and ... "**

The defense attorney appealed to the judge.

**"Your honor," he said, "the man is not answering the question.
Would you please insist that he answer the question?"**

**The judge said, "Well, he obviously wants to tell us something.
Let him speak."**

**So the man said, "Well, me and my dog and my mule
were walking along the road
and this truck came around the corner far too fast,
knocked us into the ditch.**

**The driver stopped, got out of his truck,
saw my dog was badly injured, went back to his truck,**

got his rifle, and he shot it.

Then he saw that my mule had broken his leg so he shot it.

Then he said, 'How are you?'

And I said, 'I'm perfectly fine.'"

A wise counselor advised, "respect the botherment"
which means pay attention to what is bugging you,
and try to discern what God is saying to you.

THIRD OBSERVATION: RATIFICATION

My favorite theology professor, Dr. Routt,
used to caution us to question
whether or not it is God speaking to us.

His formula was to ask:

“Is it revelation of undigested roast beef?”

Seasoned pastors – or maybe I should say “wise” pastors –
Know there are three parts to God’s call.

The first part is that the call is heard.
We talked about that already.

The second part is the call is interpreted.
We seek wise counsel from others to verify this is God calling.

The third part is to have that call ratified.
That “independent” third party advisers ratify the call.

**A pastor thinks God is calling for a new program in the church
Or a new direction in worship.**

**The pastor seeks wise counsel from a trusted advisor.
Then it is presented to the session
so the elders can ratify the call.**

**That is why the Presbyterian church is organized like it is –
It recognizes that God can – and does – call us to do things
which may cause us to challenge human systems
that are broken and need to be changed.**

**But not every “call” is a call from God.
That’s why it is wise to have it ratified by the session.**

CONCLUSION:

**Surely we can see by reading the Bible,
That God does not always choose the expected ones.**

**Jacob, Joseph, Moses, and David were all unlikely choices.
Jesus calls fishermen and laborers to serve as disciples
instead of the priests and prophets of Jerusalem.**

**Power and position in the church or community
do not guarantee a similar place in God's world.**

All, even outsiders, are given tasks in God's kingdom.

**God's call comes when we least expect it
and often to those we least expect.
God is always the God of surprises.**

**We, as the church, need to be like Eli,
encouraging everyone to hear the voice
that calls them forth into all they are created to be.**

**At the same time,
we help each other to tell the truth,
even when the truth is hard to hear.**

**The dark time in our scripture today,
wasn't that God wasn't sending out visions or His Word;
it's that people weren't hearing Him.**

**We just can't seem to resist a blinking inbox
or a buzzing phone, can we?**

**People everywhere seem to be experiencing
an epidemic of overwhelm.**

**With all these interruptions and distractions
how in the world are people supposed to be able
to listen for and hear the voice of God?**

**God is talking to us,
nudging all people all the time.**

**Now here's a soul-searching question:
Do you really want to hear God's voice?
It can be risky to ask God to speak.**

It changes our lives if we listen.

**Because no matter the details of the call;
God always calls us away from self and selfishness
and into a new life lived in love for God and neighbor.**

If we heed the call of God we will never be the same again.

But isn't that what life is all about?

Do you want to know the will of God for your life,

your every moment life?

Do you want to love God and other people?

Do you want to live life the way God intends for you to live?

Do you want to do the good that God has prepared in advance for you to do?

Do you want to be free to do that.

Then take a hard look at What are you listening to?

Who are you listening to?

There is a lot of useless noise out there.

When we listen to what God is saying,

when we act on what we hear from God, our world changes!!!

We are transformed.

Black and white becomes Technicolor.

And our lives can be filled with joy!