

Hearing God and Speaking God's Word

2nd Sun. after Epiphany – 01/14/24 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: 1 Samuel 3:1-20 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 10, “**And Yahweh came and stood, calling as before, ‘Samuel! Samuel!’ And Samuel said, ‘Speak, for Your servant hears.’**”

v.19, “**And Samuel grew, and Yahweh was with him and did not allow one of [Yahweh’s] Words to fall to the ground.**”

Introduction

✘ The Prophet Samuel was one of God’s great ones. 400 years after Moses led God’s people to the Promised Land, Yahweh called Samuel to anoint Saul and then David as the first two kings of Israel.

→ Already from the time of his birth we learn that Samuel was a gift from God. Yahweh opened his mother’s previously barren womb so that, at the age of three, his grateful mother, Hannah, gave Samuel back to God; to be raised as a servant in Yahweh’s house. So he grew up with the priest Eli; serving at the Tabernacle.

✘ When I was in Sunday school as a child, I remember loving this story. At the time of our text, Samuel is 12 or so; helping Eli who is about 80 and nearly blind. Then one day – ah hah; an Epiphany! Samuel clearly hears Yahweh calling to him by name. I’m sure any one of us would love to hear the LORD’s voice calling out our name, right?

→ It’s a great story of trust. Samuel shows himself to be the obedient “son” that Eli’s biological sons were not. His bond with Eli is one, not of bloodline but of a shared faith; a shared service to Yahweh.

→ But what I love even more in this story is God’s clear call to Samuel to speak God’s Word no matter how difficult or joyful it may be.

✘ It’s common that people speak of their life’s work as their “calling.” The Latin-rooted term for that is “vocation”. That’s how we often refer to our life’s purpose as God’s believers in the Church.

→ Your vocation; my vocation is what gives us definite direction. It’s not something you can just purchase by going to school. Nor can your “vocation” be pushed upon you by other people like parents or teachers. But just as it was with Samuel, it is God who calls you and me to our vocations; our callings in life.

→ I remember when Jesus opened my ears to finally hear Him nudging me into this vocation as one of His pastors. I wasn’t listening at first. Numerous people in the church suggested or asked, “Have you ever considered being a pastor?” To one of them, the Vicar at our church, I even said, “I will never be a pastor!” Yes, I was more dense than Samuel. It took a lot more than four times before I finally came to trust God, go back to college and then to Seminary. Then, almost 28 years ago, God put it on paper, issuing me a Divine call into the public ministry of His Church; granting me the undeserved joy; the privilege to serve Him and His people in what I now believe is one of the greatest vocations on earth.

→ But hear me well, dear Christians, I said, “One of the greatest vocations” not **THE** greatest vocation on earth. For God has blessed every one of us here this morning with the joy-filled privilege of receiving His call into **THE greatest vocation ever!**

✘ Yes, God does call to us all! Which begs the questions, “How and from where does He issue that call?” And “What is the call?” What is your God-given vocation? May the Lord open our ears to listen; to hear and to respond according to His purpose and calling today.

I. God Speaks from His House

- ⊗ The first question is this, “Where will the LORD call to us? Answer: “Wherever He pleases!” He could call to us in some place crowded with unbelievers. Abraham, considered to be the father of all the faithful, was with the moon worshipers in Syria when God called him.
 - ➔ Or God could call us in some deserted wasteland. Moses was alone shepherding his flock at Mount Sinai when God called him. In today’s Gospel Reading, Nathanael had been sitting under a fig tree when he heard the Lord’s voice. He’s God: He calls His people wherever and whenever He knows best.
- ⊗ But He has blessed you and me with a more specific answer than that in most instances. So, where has the Lord promised to call to us? Same as for Samuel, the LORD has promised to call to us in His holy house.
 - ➔ Verse one, “Now the young man Samuel was ministering to Yahweh under Eli.” Samuel was right there at the Tabernacle; Yahweh’s worship home at that time in history. “And the word of Yahweh was rare in those days; there was no frequent vision.” Does that mean God had nothing to say? Or was it that He was getting set to open the ears of a new servant?
 - ➔ Verse two, “At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his own place.” This elderly priest’s body was wearing out. And it was negatively impacting not only his duties in the LORD’s house but also in his family household. The previous chapter tells how Eli was putting his sons, Hophni and Phinehas, before the LORD! Chapter 2:12 says that they were “worthless men” because as priests, they were stealing the people’s offerings to God through threats of violence (2:13) and were laying with women who were serving at the Tabernacle’s entrance (2:22), both of which were strictly forbidden by God. Yet all that Eli did was scold his sons for their sins, which they only scoffed at and then continued as before.
- ⊗ Now we’re told that Eli “was lying down in his own place” and “The lamp of God had not yet gone out.” But “Samuel was lying down in the temple of Yahweh, where the ark of God was” (vv. 2-3). The lamp of God in the Holy Place was a lamp that was never allowed to go out, because it represented God’s constant presence on the opposite side of the curtain, in the Most Holy Place where God’s earthly throne was on top of the Ark of the Covenant. Because Eli couldn’t see, it seems that Samuel had been tasked with keeping the lamp filled with oil while Eli slept nearby.
 - ➔ Three times Yahweh calls out, “Samuel”. And three times Samuel believes that it is Eli calling to him. Verse seven says, “Samuel did not yet know Yahweh, and the word of Yahweh had not yet been revealed to him.” Had Eli become so disconnected from God that he had not taught Samuel about God’s call to His people? Was he only teaching Samuel about Moses; about the Law? We don’t know, but finally Eli wakes up to what is happening.
- ⊗ In all his 40 years as high priest Eli only heard the voice of Yahweh once. Yet God had promised His people to be right where Samuel was at – in His house – the Tabernacle!
 - ➔ And where does God promise to speak to you and me today? Where His people are gathered for worship – in His holy house. Jesus promises in Matthew 18:20, “For where two or three are gathered in My name, there am I among them.”
- ⊗ So after the third time Eli tells the boy, “Go, lie down, and if He calls you, you shall say, ‘Speak, Yahweh, for your servant hears.’ So Samuel went and lay down in his place.”
 - ➔ Is that your expectation when you come here into the Lord’s house of worship; is that your prayer today? “O Lord, You have gathered us here in Your name. Now open our ears to hear You speak; to listen intently to Your Words and Your calling to and for us.”

II. God Speaks to us in His person

⌘ So Samuel goes back to lie down; in Yahweh's worship home; eager and ready for the LORD's Word.

→ Is that the only place that God can call to us? No, He called Abraham in a vision (Gen. 15:1); He called to Moses from a burning bush; and He called Nathanael in the flesh as Jesus came from Nazareth. He can do it however He deems is best.

→ But again, we He has given us a specific method that we can count on. God has told us where to listen; how He has promised to call. Just as with Samuel, God has promised to call to us in His own person!

⌘ Verse 10 is one of the most amazing parts of this text. This time it wasn't only Yahweh's voice. It says, "Yahweh came and stood, calling as before, 'Samuel! Samuel!'" Did you catch it? "Yahweh came and stood."

→ First of all, Yahweh's presence was normally expected to be on the other side of the curtain, in the Most Holy Place; where only the High Priest was allowed to enter on Yom Kippur – The Day of Atonement". And second, Yahweh had not yet taken on the promised human flesh of the Messiah who was to be born from a virgin.

→ So, here we see that God moved toward Samuel because He knew that Samuel could not come to Him in his sinful state. So, was this an out of the ordinary, miraculous appearance of God in the flesh? We can't know, but it certainly was pointing forward to what we just celebrated at Christmas, when, as John 1:14 literally says in the Greek, "the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us...as...the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth" (Jn. 1:14).

→ Yes, Hebrews 1:1-2 gives us this certainty now today, that God speaks to us through His Son, Jesus Christ.

⌘ So, just as real as Yahweh "stood" before Samuel that night, so He stands with us here today in Jesus, who is Yahweh in human flesh.

→ He has called you and me by name, in His house, as He said your name through voice of your pastor and then called out, "I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

→ Oh, you want to be able to see and touch Him physically? Well, here He is; the true body and blood of Jesus in His holy supper, where we see and touch and taste our God's absolute and full forgiveness of sin. This is where He physically feeds and strengthens us to go forward from His house and serve Him as He has called us to do.

→ And you have already heard, with your ears, God's voice speaking directly to you in the Epistle and Gospel Readings earlier and as He speaks to you right now from His Holy Word in this text from 1 Samuel.

⌘ So friends, if you don't hear God calling to you, it's not because He isn't speaking. His voice is literally an open Book! If you and I don't hear the Lord call to us, we are the ones who have stopped listening; who have gone deaf to His Word.

→ That's why we keep coming to worship every week; why we set aside time for private and family devotions; why we gather for Bible study with fellow believers; to hear God's call...to us!

III. God calls us to speak His Word

⌘ So what is it then that He calls us to do? What is that joy-filled privilege and call into **THE greatest vocation ever** that I said earlier God has given to each one of us here?

- Again God can specifically call you into whatever He wants! At age 75, He called Abraham to move to the other side of his world and become the father of nations at age 99. He called Moses after 40 years in the wilderness to lead His people out of slavery in Egypt to wander 40 more years to The Promised Land. And God will call us to do whatever He knows is best.
- ⊗ But now in Jesus, and because of Jesus' saving work upon the cross and His victory over death on Easter, He has called every one of you and me into **THE greatest vocation ever** – to be a **Christian!** To be His beloved, blood-bought child from sin, death and the devil; to be His eager and faithful hearer of His Word, just as He did with Samuel.
- And that's not all. In your vocation as Christian, just as He did with Samuel, God comes to you and me, and He calls us **to speak for Him.**
- ⊗ Yahweh called Samuel to speak a hard word that convicted Eli and his sons of their years of disobedience and refusal to hear His Word. And we don't know about Eli's sons, but verse 18 shows Eli's response of faith, "It is Yahweh. Let Him do what seems good to Him."
- Sometimes, the Lord does call you and me to speak in the same way. We do our friends no favor when we leave them wallowing in the deadly quicksand of sin. But when we proclaim both His truth and His love, God gives us the joy of connecting them to the lifeline of Jesus for their forgiveness; for their rescue; for their eternal life.
- ⊗ This vocation God has given us; speaking His Word – it comes with God's great power and promise. In verse 19 we're told that "Samuel grew, and Yahweh was with him and did not allow one of [Yahweh's] Words to fall to the ground." So in Isaiah 55:10-11 Yahweh promises you and me today, "As the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My word be that goes out from My mouth (i.e. through us); it shall not return to Me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it."
- You see, it's God's vocation; His power; His purpose; His work and His Word. You and I – we listen first to Him and then we speak His Word. He does the rest. And we...we get watch it all in **THE greatest vocation ever!** Amen.