

January 17 2021

1 Samuel 3:1-10 SPEAK LORD, FOR YOUR SERVANT IS LISTENING.

One activity that human beings really aren't very good at is listening. It's surprising, really. There doesn't seem to be much to the art of listening – you just sit there and nod your head at the appropriate times. But for many many people, listening is a problem.

You can buy videos that help you become better listeners. There is actually a Listening Association that you can join- to help you improve your listening skills. These things exist because people naturally are not good listeners.

There might be no better example of poor listening than what happens during a sermon. People shift around. Many adults become restless school children during the short time that a sermon takes place.

People just aren't good at listening. They'd rather be talking. Or doing things. Or dreaming about things. Or watching things. But listening? That's a difficult thing to do.

Today we find out how important listening is, when it comes to your relationship with God. Remember, this is the Epiphany season, that time in the church year when Jesus reveals his glory, and lets people see his grace and mercy and love and forgiveness. Today we learn how important it is, and what a blessing it is, when we listen to Christ, when we listen to his Word. May God bless you these next few moments as you listen to God speak to

you through his Word.

Today we meet the prophet Samuel, when he was a little boy who worked in the temple under the supervision of a man named Eli. We are told in verse 1 that in "those days, the word of the Lord was rare; there were no visions." In other words, God was choosing not to speak to his people.

Why would God do that? Why would God keep himself from his people? Well, when you study the history of the nation of Israel at that time, you learn that these people were very wicked. No one was interested in listening to God, hearing his Word. People were too busy with their own lives, too busy breaking God's commands. The last thing they had time for was listening to a prophet speak the Word of God to them. And so, the Word of the Lord was rare at that time.

Is the Word of the Lord rare in your life? How often do you listen to the Word of the God? How often are you able to come to public worship? What about in your own private life? Is the Word of the Lord rare in your private life? Are you too busy to have a private devotional life with God? Are you too proud, too self-reliant – "I've just never done that sort of thing before – I don't read the Word of God on my own." Or maybe you do, but it's very quick, not much thought goes into it, because you need to get on with those more important things of life.

It's interesting to me when I talk to people who are drifting away from God – one of the most common things they say to me is this: "But I pray all the time." But is praying to God the same as listening to God? The answer is no - it's the opposite. Prayer is a

good thing, and most people don't pray enough. But prayer is not how God speaks to you. Prayer is not how Christ reveals his glory to you.

Isn't it interesting, that Eli, in our story, and Samuel - both of them were very busy working in the temple, doing religious types of things. And yet, verse 7 tells us that "Samuel did not yet know the Lord, the Word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him." God was still a stranger to Samuel. And so it is with so many people, so many of us - God is still a stranger. We're too busy to listen, and we pray at times when we remember, but really, we are failing to make his Word a priority in our lives. God becomes more and more a stranger to us. We make excuses, but in the end, we are sinning, and we know it.

But what happens when we stop, and listen to our God? Three times God called out to Samuel, and Samuel did not know it was the Lord. Finally Eli figured out what was going on - God was finally speaking, and Samuel was the one God had chosen to speak to. And then verse 10: "The Lord came and stood there, calling as at the other time, "Samuel! Samuel!" Then Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

From that moment on, God spoke to Samuel on a regular basis, and Samuel listened. He came to know God for who he really was, what he was really all about. He became a prophet that everyone respected in Israel, because everyone knew that God was speaking to Samuel, and Samuel was listening.

Isn't it amazing, that we can get to know the true God, not by doing something difficult or complicated, but simply by listening?

What a blessing it is when we take time out of our busy lives and listen to our God! On Communion Sunday, we use a Prayer of Confession... we probably ought to do one every Sunday... The

Episcopal *Book of Common Prayer* has a simple but profound prayer of confession

Most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We are truly sorry and we humbly repent, for the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us and forgive us; that we may delight in your will, and walk in your ways, to the glory of your Name. Amen.

This is similar to the prayer we pray before communion. But it is not only at communion that we ask for forgiveness.

Then we hear God's promise of forgiveness

Hear the good news:

Christ died for us while we were yet sinners;
that proves God's love toward us.

In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven!

People to leader:

In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven!

Leader and people:

Glory to God. Amen.

God told you that his Son, Jesus Christ, has taken all of your sins away. God told you that Jesus, his Son, has died as a sacrifice for you, to pay for all the mistakes you have made in your life. God told you that because of his Son, Jesus, he completely forgives you for all of your mistakes, all of your sins.

When we listen to God we hear his promises.

Isn't it amazing, that we can know these things, not by doing something complicated, but simply by listening to the Word? And what a blessing it is when we listen! Did you see what happened in our Gospel lesson for this morning? Nathanael was told about Jesus by his brother. "But how could anything good come out of Nazareth?" Nathanael said. Nathanael wasn't going to give Jesus a chance. Why listen to someone like that, someone from the middle of nowhere? But then he went and met Jesus, and listened to him. And Jesus revealed to Nathanael his power, telling Nathanael that he, Jesus, had already seen him under the fig tree, that Nathanael was a person in whom there was nothing false. The more Nathanael listened to Christ, the more amazed he became. Finally Nathanael said, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel."

These wonderful words of faith are words that we would like to feel and speak every day to our Lord, Jesus Christ. What an amazing God we have, that he would give us this kind of faith simply through his Word. What an amazing God we have, that he asks us to do nothing more than listen, to say, as Samuel says, "Speak Lord, for your servant is listening." Jesus told Nathanael, "You shall see greater things than these," and Nathanael did. He eventually saw Jesus rise from the dead and ascend into heaven.

And as we listen to our Lord, and spend time in his Word, we are able to see those same wonderful things.

Let listening to the Word of God be for you your number one priority this new year, 2021. The blessings you will receive are for you, a renewed faith, a renewed desire to serve him with your life. May these words we have repeated this morning, "Speak Lord, for your servant is listening" - may these words be your endless - a renewed understanding of God's forgiveness and love motto, not just this year, but all the days of your life. Amen.