

09-03-01.wpd—The Discipline of Listening

Lent, listening, prayer, obedience, evangelization, proclamation

1 Samuel 3:10-19

We can't speak for God until we hear from God.

### **INTRODUCTION:** (1 Sam 3:1-10 as Scripture Reading)

—Our Scripture reading told about the boy Samuel learning to hear the voice of God. It was something new for him. It was a stretch. But he finally caught on by learning a posture of heart, an attitude that we all must have, if we're to "hear the word of the Lord" ourselves. We see that attitude in **v.10**, *The LORD came and stood there, calling as at the other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" Then Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."*

—But the **text** of this message is in v.10 and following. It deals with the fact that God wants us to be His messengers, and **HOM.idea**. Those who observe Lent, know it as a time of spiritual exercise or stretching. In the next several weeks, we are going to see how sharing our faith can spiritually stretch us, and the **title** of this sermon describes the 1<sup>st</sup> step in that stretching: **the discipline of listening**. It stretches us in the *exercise of hearing God*, but also in the *exercise of speaking for Him*.

—**1 Samuel 3:10-19**, The LORD came and stood there, calling as at the other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" Then Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening." And the LORD said to Samuel: "See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make the ears of everyone who hears of it tingle. At that time I will carry out against Eli everything I spoke against his family—from beginning to end. For I told him that I would judge his family forever because of the sin he knew about; his sons made themselves contemptible, and he failed to restrain them. Therefore, I swore to the house of Eli, 'The guilt of Eli's house will never be atoned for by sacrifice or offering.'" Samuel lay down until morning and then opened the doors of the house of the LORD. He was afraid to tell Eli the vision, but Eli called him and said, "Samuel, my son." Samuel answered, "Here I am." "What was it he said to you?" Eli asked. "Do not hide it from me. May God deal with you, be it ever so severely, if you hide from me anything he told you." So Samuel told him everything, hiding nothing from him. Then Eli said, "He is the LORD; let him do what is good in his eyes." The LORD was with Samuel as he grew up, and he let none of his words fall to the ground.

### **I. God Can Speak to Unprepared People**

- A. Samuel knew Eli was a prophet and probably felt that, if God was going to speak to someone, surely it would be to Eli, not to him. (We may have that reasoning, too—thinking that, since preachers have the right training, God will only speak to them.) **No! God can**

*speak to unprepared people!*

- B. Samuel had no prior preparation for hearing God speak, even from his service in God's house. (Does, attending church prepare us to recognize God's voice? Not always, *but God can speak anyway.*)
- C. Samuel didn't even know God very well, but God knew him. (God knows us, even if we don't know how to recognize when He is speaking. He doesn't have to wait for us to feel prepared before He starts talking to us.)

**TRANS:** God speaks to us, not just to strengthen our relationship with Him, but for us to become messengers, ambassadors for His Kingdom. Learning to hear His voice doesn't require years of preparation. All we need is the right posture of heart, the attitude of young Samuel that says, "*Speak, for your servant is listening.*" Only then can we be messengers for Him. **We can't speak for God until we hear from God.**

### **II. God Can Speak at Unpredictable Times**

- A. It's not uncommon for God to communicate to us during planned times of receptivity, such as a *worship service* in church or a *daily devotional quiet time*.
1. BUT, God is known for scheduling personal talks during our *sleep schedule* or our *work schedule*, or even when we are taking care of ourselves *in the bathroom*.
  2. I think God uses spontaneity with us, to give us less time for our *deliberating* or *questioning* or *reshaping* what He show us. (By not expecting or anticipating His word coming to us, we receive it even more clearly as coming from "*out of the blue*.")
- B. God spoke to Samuel in the dark of night, while he was sleepy:
1. This parallels the sleepy spiritual state of Israel during a dark time for God's people— v.1b, "In those days the word of the Lord was rare; there were not many visions." (Our world is in a time of spiritual darkness, and to many people, *God seems silent...*)
  2. But that's not the case for Christians! We live in the days when the Holy Spirit has been poured out on all believers— **Acts 2:17-18**, "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy."

**TRANS:** God's Holy Spirit empowers us to live a *holy life*, then sends us with a *holy message*. But **we can't speak for God until we hear from God**. We need to develop a *lifestyle of listening to God*. Samuel spent time with Eli, who knew God's voice. That's great, but Eli could not hear from God for Samuel. He had to adopt and practice his own posture of receptivity, and **so do we, not just during quiet times** and church services, but at all times, because when God wants to speak to us about something is basically unpredictable.

### III. God Often Speaks an Unpopular Message

- A. God may reveal uncomfortable truths to us, like the dark message about Eli that He spoke to young Samuel. That first revelation helped prepare Samuel for a lifetime of being *God's messenger*.
- B. Samuel gave us a great example of living out his life faithfully delivering both good news and bad news from God to everyone from shepherds to kings. IN CONTRAST, God had revealed to Eli an uncomfortable message for his own sons, and when Eli failed to speak up, it damaged his standing with God.
- C. If God gives us a difficult truth to share with someone, we must trust His wisdom, and deliver the message. [The Spirit revealed to Jesus that the Samaritan woman at the well had been married five times and was presently living in adultery. When Jesus included that revelation in his message to her, rather than drive her away, it helped her take a step of faith toward Him.] (It isn't pleasant to talk about sin or its consequences, but a loving God warns us about both. If we are associated with a person whom God wants to warn, what will we do if God picks us to share His message? Will we be faithful, as Samuel was?)

### CONCLUSION:

–God is *love*, and love *communicates*. If God initiates a conversation, it's because He wants to share His truth with us. We may feel totally unprepared, it may be an inconvenient time, the message may be hard to hear and harder to share, but He will always give us the truth we need... and often the truth someone else needs. But **we won't be able to speak for God until we've listened to God**. As faithful believers, let's seek to practice the discipline of listening, having a *posture of receptivity*, always ready to say to God, "*Speak, for your servant is listening.*"

1 Samuel 3:10-19 ( NIV )

10The LORD came and stood there, calling as at the other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" Then Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

11And the LORD said to Samuel: "See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make the ears of everyone who hears of it tingle.

12At that time I will carry out against Eli everything I spoke against his family—from beginning to end.

13For I told him that I would judge his family forever because of the sin he knew about; his sons made themselves contemptible, and he failed to restrain them.

14Therefore, I swore to the house of Eli, "The guilt of Eli's house will never be atoned for by sacrifice or offering."

15Samuel lay down until morning and then opened the doors of the house of the LORD. He was afraid to tell Eli the vision,

16but Eli called him and said, "Samuel, my son." Samuel answered, "Here I am."

17"What was it he said to you?" Eli asked. "Do not hide it from me. May God deal with you, be it ever so severely, if you hide from me anything he told you."

18So Samuel told him everything, hiding nothing from him. Then Eli said, "He is the LORD; let him do what is good in his eyes."

19The LORD was with Samuel as he grew up, and he let none of his words fall to the ground.