

Text: 1 Samuel 3:1-10 Second Sunday after Epiphany. **January 18, 2015.**

Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening. Amen.

What would you think? Imagine your grandfather is staying with you. He's old. Can barely see. You are taking care of him, around the clock. One time, in the middle of the night, you hear a voice calling your name. What do you think? "It must be grandpa." You run to his bedroom. You ask, "What do you need, grandpa?" He rolls over. Rubs his sleepy eyes and says, "What?" "What do you need, grandpa? You called for me." Grandpa says, "I didn't call. Just go back to sleep." This happens a second time and a third time. What do you think? Grandpa is sleep talking? Do you really think it's God calling? Does that thought ever cross your mind?

I know we hear this account of Samuel and Eli and we easily think, "Why didn't they realize it was God? Don't they know they're in the Bible?" But let's not be so harsh. We are watching the movie and have the behind the scenes commentary and know it's in the Bible and know it's the LORD speaking. I think the amazing thing is that Eli realized it was the LORD. And even more amazing is the humble response, "Speak, for your servant is listening." Speak for your servant is listening. What a response! What a model for us! Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening. Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.

Samuel is just a really cool guy in the Bible. He has two books named after him, after all. I would encourage you to read or reread the first three chapters of 1 Samuel. Samuel's mother was unable to have children. She prayed and prayed for a child. She promised to dedicate her child to the LORD if she was so blessed. She was granted a child. She named him Samuel, which means, "The LORD listens." Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening? Maybe God had a plan here? Anyway, Samuel was dedicated to the LORD. Since about age five, he lived at the temple. Literally. His mother brought him a little robe every year when she came to the temple for one of the great worship festivals. Once when my sons were little, they put on a clergy shirt I had with the clerical collar and ran around the house. That's how I picture Samuel, the little pastor, running around with the little gown on, eager to do the tasks at the temple. Samuel was ministering, that means serving. He was running around, doing the less glorious tasks at the temple. He opened the doors in the morning. He ran errands for the nearly blind priest Eli.

He even got to sleep in the house of the LORD, where the ark of God was. Wow! The ark of God was the special place where God met with his people. The ark had two angels on top. This top was called the atonement cover, the divine place where God would come and take away the sins of the people. No person, would ever see this ark, except for the one high priest just one time a year. Samuel wouldn't see the ark, but he got to sleep close to it. There were rooms around the temple where the priests would sleep and from kindergarten or preschool age, Samuel got to sleep there. Samuel got to live closer to the ark than most people would ever get! Wow! Amazing! It just really shows that when you serve the LORD, you get to be close to the LORD. When you work for the LORD with an attitude of humble submission, the LORD draws you closer to him.

But sadly, all was far from well. Even Samuel who slept so close to the LORD, had not had a real, direct experience. The Word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him. Let me just add, but it has been revealed to us! That's Epiphany, Jesus reveals himself to us, reveals his majesty and miracles to us. The Word of the LORD has been revealed to us. But not to Samuel before this time.

Not to Eli, not really to anyone at that time. It's a very sad state of affairs. Eli had the title of priest, but the LORD didn't come to Eli. Maybe that's because even though Eli had the title, he didn't have the humble attitude of faith. In his old age, Eli had relinquished the duties of the high priest to his sons. It wasn't their calling card that they slept close to God. They slept with the young women who served at the temple. They were not known for a humble attitude of, "Speak, LORD." They did the talking. When someone would bring an offering, a holy offering to the LORD, an offering that they were to sacrifice and give to God himself, they took the offering and ate it for themselves. If someone objected and said, "This is the LORD's offering!" They just took it by force. They and Eli, fattened themselves on the offerings that were meant for the LORD.

No wonder there were not many visions. Eli was blind in his eyes and his sons were blind to God's Word. The darkness was so thick, that even God's Word had a hard time busting through the darkness and bringing light. The Word of the LORD was rare. Rare like gold. Rare like diamonds. Rare and precious and valuable and those with the humble faith of Samuel were rare and precious to God. So God chose to send his Word to Samuel, a young boy of maybe twelve years old, who had the attitude, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

I think we understand the account and the confusion. Samuel hears a voice and he eagerly runs to Eli, even in the middle of the night. It was probably 3 or 4 a.m. as the lamps lit at dusk were still burning until dawn. Old, sleepy Eli is not so eager to wake up. Can't you see the weary rub of the eyes, hear the half-spoken, "Go back. Lie down"? I think we can understand why it took a while for anyone to realize. Eli finally did realize it was the LORD and advised, "Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening." Samuel humbly followed the advice of the blind, old man and said, "Speak, for your servant is listening." Let's not jump on Samuel for leaving out the LORD. It's a noticeable omission. It shows maybe how little Samuel knew, but also how great his faith in spite of that lack of knowledge. He was simply willing to let God speak and Samuel was going to listen. Notice to whom the LORD spoke, not the religiously experienced man with the title, but the humble boy, eagerly serving with faith. Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.

Take a look at Eli and Samuel. How do you see yourself? Are you half asleep when God is speaking, here at worship, just putting in your hour? Is the Word of the LORD rare in your home, an unusual guest, or a precious companion? Don't we all come to the Bible with this attitude, at least at times, "Listen, LORD, I'm speaking!" Tell me what I want my ears are itching to hear, or I'm not buying. Listen, LORD. I'm speaking! That's our selfish attitude. That's our sinful attitude. That's our Satan born, send me to hell attitude.

But look at what God revealed. His Word. In that Word we find a Savior, Jesus. Jesus not only perfectly listened to God's Word, Jesus took his perfection and counted it for you. When Jesus was tempted, he took your place and said to the devil, "It is written. It is written. Get behind me, Satan. It is written." That perfect attitude is yours through Jesus! We are perfect in God's eyes. Jesus bled to forgive it. Jesus rose to prove it. Yes, rose to prove it. Our Savior is risen. Jesus has slain our selfishness. Jesus slew our sinfulness. Jesus stopped Satan in his tracks. The grave is empty. Your sins are gone.

God has given to you a new attitude. This new attitude says with Samuel, "Speak, for your servant is listening." Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening. Before Samuel could be a prophet, one who speaks for God, Samuel had to be a servant, one listening to God. That attitude of humble submission to God's Word is a special gift from God, an attitude God wants all his children to have. Approach God's Word

with this attitude, "Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening." Maybe it won't make sense. Maybe it won't be popular. Maybe it won't be politically correct, but LORD, it's your Word. LORD, I am your servant. LORD, you are speaking and I will be listening. The LORD didn't speak to the guy with the title. The LORD spoke to the boy with the humble attitude.

So how do I get that humble attitude? Study God's Word and God's Word will give you that attitude. Get together with your fellow Christians to talk about God's Word. See their humility. Listen to your brothers and sisters. Learn from their experiences of how blessed they were and more blessed they are when they say, "Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening." Vine and Branches, our small-group, in-home, sermon-based Bible discussions are starting up again. There's a chance, a great chance to sit with humble Christians who say, "Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening." Sign up. Get in a group. Gather with people who have humble faith, who just love saying, "Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening." You'll be amazed at the humble faith of God's people. And your own faith will grow as you continually get together and say, "Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening." Amen.