

## **Speak, For Your Servant Is Listening**

January 18, 2009

Pastor David A. Easterday

Focus: **The Lord came and stood there, calling as at the other times, “Samuel! Samuel.” Then Samuel said, “Speak, for your servant is listening.”** (I Samuel 3:10)

Dear friends in Christ,

It is an old story but a relevant one. An ice fisherman walked out onto the ice carrying his fishing gear. He put everything down and got out his ice saw in preparation for cutting the hole in the ice. As he leaned over to begin, a voice from above said, “There are no fish in this location.” The man was startled, but was not to be stopped, so he moved to a new location on the ice and leaned over again. Once again the voice from on high said, “There are no fish in this location.” He moved to a third location only to hear the voice now speak in a much firmer tone, “There are no fish in this location. This is the announcer and you are in an ice-skating rink!”

Samuel also heard a voice calling to him that day. He was a young boy, the son of Hannah. She had waited for a long time for a child, and with God’s promise of a son had been blessed with Samuel. She dedicated him to the Lord and gave him to Eli to serve in the temple. On the day he heard the voice, God hadn’t said much to the people at that time. There were few prophecies. They were “rare” because they were so infrequent. This in itself was a blessing from God, for if God had spoken, it would have been a voice of judgment. It was a time of such wickedness that even the sons of Eli were affected. The Bible tells us,

**Eli’s sons were wicked men; they had no regard for the Lord.** (I Samuel 2:12)

There were certain prescribed methods for the priests to take from some of the meat that was being sacrificed, but Eli’s sons instead went around asking for the choicest meat even before it was sacrificed. God was mercifully silent during this time.

But on this special day, God's voice would be heard. Now it was heard by a young boy. This boy did not know the Lord, which meant that he had never heard the voice of God before. He had been taught about God, but had not personally heard his voice until this day. Consequently, he was somewhat confused, and three different times ran to Eli asking what he wanted. Eli realized what was happening, and gave some very sound advice to this young boy.

**So Eli told Samuel, "Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, 'Speak, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place. (I Samuel 3:9)**

Samuel showed great respect for the advice of this wise man, and responded as instructed when God called again,

**Speak, for your servant is listening.**

Now we have this wonderful testimony of faith as we consider the voice of God speaking to us today!

So the question to ponder is this. Whose voice or voices are we listening to today? The Israelites heard the voice of God from Mt. Sinai. Moses writes this about that voice.

**Then the Lord spoke to you out of the fire. You heard the sound of words but saw no form; there was only a voice. He declared to you his covenant, the Ten Commandments, which he commanded you to follow and then wrote them on two stone tablets. And the Lord directed me at that time to teach you the decrees and laws you are to follow in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess. (Deuteronomy 4:12-14)**

They heard the voice. They were attentive to the voice, and had the desire to be obedient to that voice. This was their willing response.

**So Moses went back and summoned the elders of the people and set before them all the words the Lord had commanded him to speak. The people all responded together, "We will do everything the Lord has said." So Moses brought their answer back to the Lord. (Exodus 19:7-8)**

They committed to be obedient to that voice. But this would only last for a time, as they would now find that voice from God, the one they heard at Mt. Sinai, to be a voice to be feared. For

now this voice was a voice of judgment, and they didn't want to hear it from God. They now wanted a different voice to speak on God's behalf.

**The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him. For this is what you asked of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said, "let us not hear the voice of the Lord our God nor see this great fire anymore, or we will die. (Deuteronomy 18:15-16)**

God would not remain silent in the days of Moses, and spoke through the great prophet. Now, he would once again speak, but now through the voice of Samuel.

Does God continue to speak to us today? Of course he does. As he does, his voice describes some very specific expectations that God has of each of us. The first is that we would be holy. We were created by God in his holy image, and God still desires that kind of life from us. This is what God said about holiness.

**I am the Lord your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy. Do not make yourselves unclean by any creature that moves about on the ground. I am the Lord who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God; therefore be holy, because I am holy. (Leviticus 11:44-45)**

God expects us to listen to his voice, and to live a holy life. The difficulty is that there are many other voices out in the world offering a different plan. These are the voices that tell us that we are called to defile ourselves with wine, women, and song. They are very convincing voices, and many fall into the trap that they present in our holy relationship with God.

God also calls us to sacrifice. Throughout the Bible, God's people have been asked to set aside things that they think are important for the sake of obedience to God. Consider Abraham. He and Sarah waited many years for the birth of this son. He was their only son, and they undoubtedly loved him dearly. But the voice of God came to Abraham, and in a way similar to Samuel, he responded, "Here I am."

**Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied. Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love,**

**and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about.** (Genesis 22:1-2)

We are called to set aside the things that we want for the sake of obedience to God and to his plan. But we struggle with this also, as our focus continues to be on “Me, Myself, and I!” We find it easy to focus on getting all we can at the cost of others. Perhaps the current national economic circumstance is a reminder to us that we have spent too much time on self, and not enough time on sacrifice. As times continue to be difficult for people, we will all be called to make more sacrifices, to help those without incomes, and to share the gifts God has given us. As a church we will be called to joyful but sacrificial giving for the sake of the ministry. But are we ready to hear the voice of God calling us to willingly sacrifice for his sake? I suspect that this will be an ongoing problem for many.

The third call of the voice of God is that of service. We sang a hymn asking, “Take my life and let it be consecrated Lord, to Thee.” Just as the Lord called Samuel, so Jesus called His disciples. We heard this in the Gospel reading today,

**The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, He said to him, “Follow Me.”** (John 1:43)

The voice of God calls us to follow and to serve Jesus with heart and soul and mind and strength. Once again there are many voices telling us to do something else. Common sense says that following Jesus may not be a good thing, especially because of the impact with our jobs and our families. Yet, this still continues to be the voice of God calling to us today!

Ultimately, there is only one true call of God that is answered perfectly. It is the call of God to his only Son, Jesus Christ. As Jesus began His ministry, He heard the affirming voice of God as He stood in the waters of the Jordan River at His baptism.

**And a voice came from heaven: “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.”** (Mark 1:11)

God had much to be pleased about. This Son truly was holy. Conceived and born through the Holy Spirit and not the sinful flesh of man, He lived a holy and perfect life among men. As He began His time of preaching and teaching, He understood the call to sacrifice, for He now offered His life for us on the cross of Calvary. There was no hesitation in His call to serve by offering His life for us. He willingly endured the shame of the cross for people who are not holy, for people who are not willing to sacrifice, for people who are not willing to serve. His sacrificial death on the cross has removed all of this defilement from our lives so that the death we deserve has now been replaced with new life. As we heard last week, we are now buried with Jesus in that bloody death on the cross, and as He was then raised from the dead on the third day, we now are given new life! All that was wrong in our life has now gone. All that leads to death has been replaced by His obedience that gives us life. That voice of God continues to call us to come to the cross and receive the blessing of forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and the promise of resurrection! This is the true voice of God!

The cross has changed many things, but the voice of God still continues to call us even today. The voice of God still calls us to be holy which is possible now through Jesus. The voice of God calls us to be sacrificial with all the gifts of time, talents, and treasures that he gives us, making that possible through Jesus. The voice of God calls us to a life of service that is now possible as we consider the life of Jesus and His service to us.

As we begin this new year of ministry at Trinity, consider the voice of God as he speaks to you, and as you do, remember the precious words of Samuel,

**Speak, for your servant is listening.**

Amen.