
Sermon ::: on 1 Samuel 3:1–10
“Becoming the People of God”
”Your Servant is Listening”

::: ZERO :::

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

*“Grace to you and PEACE from God our Father
and the Lord Jesus Christ. “*

1 Co 1:3. (NRSV)

::: Amen.

::: ONE :::

Here at Peace Church when the worship service is finished most people stay together to talk to each other—and share the company, the fellowship... and of course some tea or coffee.

Especially in the winter months when we gather in the fellowship hall this can be quite tricky.

Quite tricky for persons like me—non-native English-speakers.

But usually, the *speaking* is not so much the problem. Rather the *listening* and even further the *understanding* is the tricky bit.

So, it's rather getting tricky for the non-native English-*listeners*.

When all people in the room start chatting, the children race around screaming, the table soccer is banging... that's when listening gets really tough.

::: TWO :::

Sometimes then you will realize that suddenly in a conversation I will turn my face away from you so that your mouth is speaking directly to my ear.

Or you might wonder why I put my hand to the ear like this (forming a larger shell).

Turning away the eyes might seem a little awkward or even offensive—but actually it is a necessary act...

... in order to really hear the words that are spoken, and even more...

... to understand what is said.

::: THREE :::

Now, in this passage of 1st Samuel 3 the situation is a little different.

It's not the all-generation friendly Philippuskirche with church coffee, a playing area, a stage, a chitty-chatty kitchen space and a hallway table soccer, ...

It is the temple of God, with the lamp of God and the ark of the covenant.

It's the place of God's condensed presence, holy ground, holy space...

... with the aging and sight-losing Eli and the growing boy Samuel, both ministering the Lord...

... and Eli's sons. But we rather don't go in that, that's another story for another time.

Dawn is approaching but the lamp of the Lord, the seven-armed candle stand is still illuminating the sanctuary.

It is the time of night when sometimes dreaming and being awake blend into one another.

It is right then when Samuel hears a voice calling his name...

∴ FOUR ∴

If during that time of night, you would hear your name called, what would you think?

I guess it would be more than obvious to refer to the next person in the room or the building. Who else could have called your name?

And there is an additional obstacle:

“The word of the Lord was rare in those days; visions were not widespread.”

1 Sa 3:1 (NRSV)

And:

“Samuel did not yet know the Lord, and the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him.”

1 Sa 3:7 (NRSV)

So, no wonder Samuel did not immediately understand what was going on.

And of course, he would have turned to the most probable solution to the events.

::: FIVE :::

In words of Dr. Lisa Hancock, Director of Worship Arts at Discipleship Ministries:

“[E]ven though the word of the Lord is rare, even though those who are supposed to speak for the Lord are going blind, the “lamp of God has not yet gone out.” We may have given up on God, but God has not given up on us.

The Voice still calls.

It may be night in our souls, the darkness of doubt and fear and emptiness, but the Voice still calls.

That is what our faith tells us when our ears are weary of listening to the silence. But then, there isn't any silence anymore, is there?

That may be why we don't hear, not because it is too quiet, but because it is too loud.

It's loud in our world with distractions aplenty, voices calling, blaming, warning, vying for our attention.

It's loud in our souls, where we are filled with our own questions and fears, filled with our own failures and inadequacies.

It is so loud we don't hear the Voice anymore, the Voice that leads and comforts, the Voice that challenges and guides.

We don't hear it anymore because we've stopped listening.

Or if we do hear it, it sounds just like all the other voices around us.

No wonder Samuel thought he was hearing Eli. No wonder we think it is a spouse or a friend, or a book we read, or a song we heard.

No wonder we thought it was indigestion or an impulse to do something really crazy. Because we've forgotten how to listen for the Voice.

When Eli finally (finally!) figures out what is going, on he begins to teach; he begins to mentor.

::: SIX :::

Instead of using Samuel as someone to do the grunt work, to clean now and ask questions

later, he finally begins to introduce him to the source of the Voice.

He names that source, "Lord." Say "Speak Lord," says Eli, "That's what you say.

That's the beginning of putting yourself within hearing distance of the Voice."

And then, having identified the source, put yourself in the position— "your servant," the one who follows, the one who obeys, the one who does.

"Your servant is listening," that's what you say, explains Eli. You say, "I know who you are, I know who I am, and I want to hear what you have to say. I want to be led; I want to be taught. I want to be claimed."

It isn't easy, Samuel gets it wrong at first.

"Speak, your servant is listening."

He missed the address, missed the identification. But that's ok; that will come.

Because it comes from a servant's heart. Speak, Lord, your servant is listening."

∴ SEVEN ∴

Sometimes we need to turn away our eyes from the flickering screens, need to widen our ears, in order to hear the soft voices, listen to them—and understand what they are saying.

We need to listen closely in order to hear when God is calling us.

Also, we need to be open to speak to people about what we hear.

And sometimes, we need to be the ones giving guidance and mentoring to those who heard the voice and are now looking to understand the call they received.

Let us be the people of God, listening closely to God's voice, listen to each other to understand, and speaking to each other to discern God's will for us and for our world.

∴ Amen.

ⁱ <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/becoming-the-people-of-god/second-sunday-after-the-epiphany-year-b-lectionary-planning-notes/second-sunday-after-the-epiphany-year-b-preaching-notes> (2024-01-13).