

Preacher: Pastor Twyla

Scripture: 1 Samuel 3:1-10 (from The Message)

³ The boy Samuel was serving God under Eli's direction. This was at a time when the revelation of God was rarely heard or seen. One night Eli was sound asleep (his eyesight was very bad—he could hardly see). It was well before dawn; the sanctuary lamp was still burning. Samuel was still in bed in the Temple of God, where the Chest of God rested.

⁴⁻⁵ Then God called out, "Samuel, Samuel!" Samuel answered, "Yes? I'm here." Then he ran to Eli saying, "I heard you call. Here I am." Eli said, "I didn't call you. Go back to bed." And so he did.

⁶⁻⁷ God called again, "Samuel, Samuel!" Samuel got up and went to Eli, "I heard you call. Here I am." Again Eli said, "Son, I didn't call you. Go back to bed." (This all happened before Samuel knew God for himself. It was before the revelation of God had been given to him personally.)

⁸⁻⁹ God called again, "Samuel!"—the third time! Yet again Samuel got up and went to Eli, "Yes? I heard you call me. Here I am." That's when it dawned on Eli that God was calling the boy. So Eli directed Samuel, "Go back and lie down. If the voice calls again, say, 'Speak, God. I'm your servant, ready to listen.'" Samuel returned to his bed.

¹⁰ Then God came and stood before him exactly as before, calling out, "Samuel! Samuel!" Samuel answered, "Speak. I'm your servant, ready to listen."

Back when the telegraph was the fastest method of long-distance communication, a young man applied for a job as a Morse Code operator. Answering an ad in the newspaper, he went to the office address that was listed. When he arrived, he entered a large, busy office filled with noise and clatter, including the sound of the telegraph in the background. A sign on the receptionist's counter instructed job applicants to fill out a form and wait until they were summoned to enter the inner office.

The young man filled out his form and sat down with the seven other applicants in the waiting area. After a few minutes, the young man stood up, crossed the room to the door of the inner office, and walked right in. Naturally, the other applicants perked up, wondering what was going on. They muttered among themselves that they hadn't heard any summons yet. They assumed that the young man who went into the office made a mistake and would be disqualified.

Within a few minutes, however, the employer escorted the young man out of the office and said to the other applicants, "Gentlemen, thank you very much for coming, but the job has just been filled."

The other applicants began grumbling to each other, and one spoke up saying, "Wait a minute, I don't understand. He was the last to come in, and we never even got a chance to be interviewed. Yet he got the job. That's not fair!"

The employer said, "I'm sorry, but all the time you've been sitting here, the telegraph has been ticking out the following message in Morse Code: 'If you understand this message, then come right in. The job is yours.' None of you heard it or understood it. This young man did. The job is his."

We live in a world that is full of busyness and noise, like that office. People are distracted and unable to hear the voice of God as he speaks to them. What are some of the distractions that keep us from hearing God? First, there is avoidance. We can't hear what we don't see. By ignoring a problem or denying one that exists, we simply look in another direction.

Another noise that inhibits our ability to hear is temptation—all those things that we do to make us “feel” better, those things that sap our time, energy, and resources. These are nothing more than distractions which keep us from doing what we really want to do.

There are also sounds of guilt, resentment, failure, and shame. We are unable to hear the voice of God when we have blocked forgiveness from setting us free.

The one noise that seems to ring the loudest and keeps us deaf is fear. Fear grips us to the point that we can’t move or think.

What about you? Are you tuned in to God’s voice? Do you hear him when he speaks to you? Are you listening? God does speak to us; and God does it in a manner that makes it possible to hear him.

In John 8:47, we read, “He who belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God.”

If we want to hear God’s voice, we need to tune in to God. We can’t listen to our favorite radio station or watch our favorite television program unless our radio or television is tuned in to the correct station. The same thing is true if we want to hear God—we can’t hear God’s voice unless we’re tuned in to Him.

In today’s Bible reading, we find that little Samuel was lying in the temple, one night, trying to sleep. His mind was probably racing from everything he had learned that day. Samuel was about 8 or 9 years old and he was living with Eli, the priest. His mother, Hannah, had dedicated him to the Lord as a baby, an act that she had promised God if he would give her a child; so Samuel as a boy learned the tasks of a priest under Eli.

That night, while Samuel was trying to get some rest, he heard somebody call his name. Naturally, he thought it was Eli, and he ran to Eli and said, “Here I am, what do you want?” Eli’s response was “I didn’t call you, go back to bed.” So Samuel went back to bed and the same thing happened again. He heard somebody call his name; he went to Eli, and Eli again said, “It wasn’t me” Samuel went back to bed. The same thing happened a third time, but this time Eli realized that God was the one calling little Samuel. Eli gave Samuel some instructions on hearing from God and Samuel went to bed and heard the voice of God, but this time he acknowledged God’s presence and listened to what God had to say.

At the beginning of this experience, Samuel didn’t quite know what was going on. He thought that Eli was calling him. He wasn’t tuned in to God. The Scripture actually says, “the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him.” If Samuel had been tuned in to God, he would have known that it was God who was speaking to him.

The questions that arise for each of us at this point is “Am I tuned in to God? Can I tell when God is speaking to me?”

A Native American and his friend were in downtown New York City, walking near Times Square in Manhattan. It was during the noon lunch hour and the streets were filled with people. Cars were honking their horns, taxicabs were squealing around corners, sirens were wailing, and the sounds of the city were almost deafening.

Suddenly, the Native American said, “I hear a cricket.”

His friend said, “What? You must be crazy. You couldn’t possibly hear a cricket in all of this noise!”

“No, I’m sure of it,” the Native American said. “I heard a cricket.”

“That’s crazy,” said the friend.

The Native American listened carefully for a moment, and then walked across the street to a big cement planter where some shrubs were growing. He looked into the bushes, beneath the

branches, and sure enough, he located a small cricket. His friend was utterly amazed. “That’s incredible,” said his friend. “You must have super-human ears!”

“No,” said the Native American. “My ears are no different from yours. It all depends on what you’re listening for.”

“But that can’t be!” said the friend. “I could never hear a cricket in this noise.”

“Yes, it’s true,” came the reply. “It depends on what you’re listening for. Here, let me show you.”

He reached into his pocket, pulled out a few coins, and discreetly dropped them on the sidewalk. And then, with the noise of the crowded street still blaring in their ears, they noticed every head within twenty feet turn and look to see if the money that tinkled on the pavement was theirs.

“See what I mean?” asked the Native American. “It all depends on what you’re listening for.”

If you’re tuned in to God, it doesn’t matter what’s going on around you—you will hear Him speak.

Ok, so you want to tune in to God. Well, what station is He on? How can you hear him? There are numerous ways God speaks to us.

When reading through the Old Testament, we find many different stories of times God spoke to people. For example, God and Adam were just chilling in the Garden and chit-chatting. God spoke to Noah to build a huge boat. God spoke to Abraham and told Him he could have all the land where he set his foot. And how could we forget about the time when God spoke to Moses through a burning bush that wasn’t being consumed.

We also find stories of God communicating with people in the New Testament. God spoke to Mary, Jesus’ mother, through an angel and told her she would have His baby. There was also the time when Paul saw the resurrected Jesus on the road to Damascus and heard Him speak.

We read these wonderful stories and can’t help but think, “Wow, I wish God would speak to me like that.” But, I wonder, how we would respond if God did speak to us like that?! I think it would literally scare many of us to death. While God may not necessarily reveal himself to us in similar ways, God, without a doubt, does speak to us.

One way that God speaks to us is through those he calls to ministry. In Ephesians 4:11-12, we read,

“And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.”

This means that whenever you sit in a service like this or attend a Bible study, you’re hearing from God. He speaks through pastors, teachers, and evangelists.

Another way God speaks to us is through His Word. We read in Psalm 119:105: “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” You first learn how to hear from God by following His written word. If you can’t follow what He’s written in His word, chances are, you couldn’t follow His audible word.

God speaks to us through the Holy Spirit. In Romans 8:16 we read, *“The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,”*

This is also known as the inward witness or inward intuition. The Holy Spirit will verify that you’re doing the right thing or going the right way. If you’re going in the wrong direction, or making the wrong decision, you’ll feel an uneasiness on the inside, and that’s the Holy Spirit letting you know something’s up.

January 17, 2021 - Listen Closely

God speaks through the inward voice or the conscience. Romans 9:1 says:

"I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit."

Have you heard of the "still, small voice"? This is it. It's not real strong and overwhelming saying, "DON'T DO THAT!" It's the Spirit within your own spirit speaking to you and it mostly speaks in just a word or a phrase. Maybe if you're planning on doing something or going somewhere, the inward voice may say, "Wait," or "Not Yet," or "Stop."

God speaks through the authoritative voice of the Holy Spirit. In Acts, we read the story of a coming together for the sharing of the Gospel. God was working for a meeting to occur between a Gentile centurion and the Apostle Peter. Peter received a vision with some instructions to help him engage with Gentiles who were counter to Jewish law. While he thought on these things, Cornelius sent three men to Peter. When they arrived, it was then that the authoritative voice of the Spirit spoke as we read in Acts 10:19:

"While Peter thought about the vision, the Spirit said to him, 'Behold, three men are seeking you.'"

In other words, don't hesitate, go to them, do as I say. Now, if God speaks to you like this, it's gonna' seem a lot louder on the inside. It may even seem audible as if you can hear it with your ears because it is so strong. This rarely happens. It is not an everyday thing.

God speaks to you through His word, through those called to minister, through the Holy Spirit on the inside of you, through your conscience, and through the authoritative voice of the Holy Spirit. So, chances are that you've had the opportunity to hear God's voice at some point or another, but still, the question remains, "Are you listening closely?" Or are you getting some deadly Interference.

Draw near to God and listen. Say "Here I am Lord, I'm listening." The closer you get to God, the louder His voice will be. Amen.