

The Second Sunday after the Epiphany

January 18, 2015

Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

1 Samuel 3:1-10

The boy Samuel ministered before the LORD under Eli. In those days the word of the LORD was rare; there were not many visions. One night Eli, whose eyes were becoming so weak that he could barely see, was lying down in his usual place. The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was. Then the LORD called Samuel. Samuel answered, "Here I am." And he ran to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." But Eli said, "I did not call; go back and lie down." So he went and lay down. Again the LORD called, "Samuel!" And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." "My son," Eli said, "I did not call; go back and lie down." Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD: The word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him. The LORD called Samuel a third time, and Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." Then Eli realized that the LORD was calling the boy. So Eli told Samuel, "Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place. The LORD came and stood there, calling as at the other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" Then Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening." (NIV)

The story is told of Franklin Roosevelt, who often endured long receiving lines at the White House greeting his guests. His top complaint was that no one really paid any attention to what he said in those lines. So one day, during a reception, he decided to try an experiment. To each person who passed down the line and shook his hand, he murmured, *"I murdered my grandmother this morning."* President Roosevelt quickly found out he was right that no one was really listening. The guests responded with phrases like, *"Marvelous! Keep up the good work. We are proud of you. God bless you, sir."* It was not till the end of the line, while greeting the ambassador from Bolivia, that his words were actually heard. Puzzled, the ambassador leaned over and whispered, *"I'm sure she had it coming."*

Are you listening? Are you a good listener? How important is it to be a good listener? Troubled teens during interviews in a San Francisco study were asked: *"Is there anything you needed most and couldn't get?"* The top response, usually with much sadness and tears was: *"What I needed most was someone to listen to me. Someone who cared enough to listen to me."* Listening is very important. I believe it is a skill we all could use some work at to become better listeners. Communication breaks down when we do not listen. When what we are being told is something significant, and the one speaking to us has vital knowledge to give, listening is extremely important.

Today, someone wants to speak to you. He wants to speak to you with words that are living and active. The One who wants to speak to you today knows you and calls to you by name. This morning I pray the wonderful, amazing truth before us encourages us to open our ears to hear and our hearts to believe His every word. Dear friends: **Keep Listening! God wants to Speak to You.**

How can you not love the story of Samuel? This child was an answer to his mother Hannah's fervent prayers for a son. Do you remember how Hannah year after year stood crying and praying at the temple to the Lord for this child? Then recall her tremendous sacrifice as she

gave her son back to the Lord. Hannah brought her little Samuel to the house of the Lord where he would serve God his whole life. This is what Samuel is doing as we read: ***“The boy Samuel ministered before the LORD under Eli.”*** Eli is the high priest and at this time he was getting up there in years and needed help. So Samuel helped care for his needs and took care of some of the day to day responsibilities in the temple.

Yet, this neat story takes place during some not so nice times. We read: ***“In those days the word of the LORD was rare; there were not many visions.”*** This is not because God did not want to speak with His people, but because His people did not want to listen. It was not because God did not care, but because the people’s hearts had become calloused. God’s word was rare, not because the Lord didn’t want to use it to guide His people, but because of all the people who each chose to do what they saw fit. Even in the temple, especially among Eli’s sons, there was much wickedness.

This is what makes what happens here that much more remarkable. Late one night, probably shortly before dawn as the nightly oil in the lamps had just a little oil left, the boy Samuel hears someone call his name. You know what happens. Samuel runs to Eli thinking it was him that called. He says: ***“Here I am; you called me.”*** But Eli said, ***“I did not call; go back and lie down.”*** So he went and lay down. Then it happens again. Samuel, even though He served the Lord, and trusted in His promises of the Messiah, never had the Lord speak directly to him before and so again he ran to Eli. He did not recognize the voice of the Lord. Then it happens a third time. Samuel hears his name and as before this faithful boy says: ***“Here I am; you called me.”*** Now Eli realizes that it was the Lord who was calling Samuel. He gives Samuel some very wise advice. He says: ***“Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, ‘Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.’”*** So Samuel went and lay down in his place. ***The LORD came and stood there, calling as at the other times, “Samuel! Samuel!”*** Then Samuel said, ***“Speak, for your servant is listening.”***

Wouldn’t that be awesome? How would you like God to speak to you? How would you like to hear the Lord of heaven and earth call to you by name? Do you know who absolutely fell in love with this account? Martin Luther did. He too lived during a time when the word of the Lord was rare. The first time he read the story of Samuel how he wished he could be like Samuel and hear God’s voice! But the great discovery of Luther’s life was that God did speak to him just as He once spoke to Samuel. The Lord spoke to him on the pages of the Bible. God spoke to Luther through His Word. Today, God speaks to us in the same way. In our baptisms God even call us by name. God speaks to you right here, right now, with His Word.

Now the question is: do we gladly say with Samuel: ***“Speak, Lord, your servant is listening?”*** We have a wonderful blessing because the word of the Lord is far from rare. I have not found many homes at all where people don’t have at least one Bible. There is barely an office or hotel room where you cannot find a Bible. God’s Word is everywhere. God still wants to speak to people – to you – to me. So are we listening? Are we taking advantage of His Words that are so available? What if we started keeping track and made a chart of the hours we spend in front of the television compared to the hours we spend reading the Bible or in family devotions. Or perhaps compare how much time we spend on our favorite sport or hobby compared to our time in worship and Bible study. What would those ratios look like?

I have often wondered why it is easy to sit through a three hour football game or a long movie if it is good. Yet, if church gets too long or when the sermon starts getting past the ten minute mark I find even myself starting to squirm in my seat. It is easy to become distracted and not do a very good job of listening. Is that perhaps because the devil knows the truth we are

focusing on today. Here in His Word God speaks to us. God is speaking to us and the devil doesn't want us to listen. Satan doesn't want us to hear God's truths. He does not want us to keep listening. So the first goal is to try to get us away from the Word. If that doesn't work he tries to trick us into listening but not really listening to the word, especially the parts we may not want to hear. So do we listen when God says our gossip is sin, and coveting is wrong, that sex is only for one man and one woman in marriage, and that even one sin damns us to hell?

Are we still then quick to respond: ***“Speak, Lord, your servant is listening?”*** If you go onto read what God says to Samuel you will find it was not all pleasant. God told him to speak some difficult words to Eli. But this is what this young prophet did. He listened to the Lord. He listened to everything the Lord had to say to him. Then as a faithful prophet He spoke that word. At the end of this chapter is one of my favorite passages when it says of Samuel that he ***“he let none of (the Lords) words fall to the ground.”***

I pray we listen to the Lord in the same way so we do not let a single one of His words fall to the ground. What do you hear when you listen to all the words of God? When God speaks to you what does He say? He says more to us than just pointing out our sins. He tells us about His Son Jesus who always listened to the Word, gladly heard it and obeyed it. The Lord tells us He declares us righteous because of Jesus' obedience. The Lord speaks to us about the Savior who bought us with the price of His own blood. He wants us to hear the Savior praying for our forgiveness as He was dying for it, so we might lend our ears to His cries as He suffers our punishment on the cross, and so we might listen as He proclaims it finished and our sins paid in full. He wants us to hold onto every Word so that we might hear and understand what it means when a risen Jesus on the third day announces to us ***“peace be with you.”*** God speaks to us so that we might know Jesus and have life, yes even eternal life.

God wants to speak to you! This is much better than standing in line to shake hands with and hear a few words from the President. God wants to speak to you! Do we really want to miss anything He has to say? God wants to speak to you! He wants to call you by name. He wants to comfort you, guide you, and tell you everything you need to know. God wants to speak to you! His word is not rare but everywhere. God wants to speak to you! I pray we always answer like Samuel, ***“Speak, Lord, your servant is listening.”*** I pray we keep listening! Amen.