

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, WA
January 18, 2015**

1 Samuel 3:1-10

Learning to Listen to the Lord

**Hymns: 283 – 735 – 90 – 389
Closing 367**

All Scripture quotations from NIV 1984

How well do you listen? If your spouse says, "Not well," the research says, "Even worse!" According to studies done by Wright St. University in Dayton, OH, the average person listens at only about 25% efficiency. 25 Percent! Two of the biggest reasons according to that research: 1) We are thinking about what we are going to say while others are talking to us; 2) We have become a more self-centered culture in general.

That research is alarming because listening is vital to our relationships. If you take in a quarter of what your co-workers say, what aren't you getting accomplished? If you process 25% of what your spouse shares, what feelings and issues are you not addressing? If your children digest a fourth of your instruction, what important information are they living without? 25 percent goes a long way in explaining why we often have so many frustrations in our relationships. The kicker, of course, is that we only have ourselves to blame for our lack of listening.

What is true with these relationships is also true with this one. Typically, we are very good at speaking to God. We are quick to tell him what we want; quick to tell him what would be best for our lives; quick to demand answers. But listening? Listening is often another story, isn't it? And again, that is disconcerting because listening is also at the heart of our relationship with God. What answers do we not find; what comfort do we not feel; what joy and hope do we not experience; all because we do not listen to our LORD?

That we must learn to listen to the LORD is at the heart of the Bible lesson that we are going to look at today. It comes from the Old Testament book of 1 Samuel, chapter 3, verses 1-10. I invite you to open up your Bibles and follow along there as we *Learn to Listen to the Lord* with Samuel.

We begin with vv. 1-3, where we are taught first to *Value the Voice of the Lord*: "**1) The boy Samuel ministered before the LORD under Eli. In those days the word of the LORD was rare; there were not many visions. 2) One night Eli, whose eyes were becoming so weak that he could barely see, was lying down in his usual place. 3) 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.**"

Samuel was an Israelite who lived in the time between Moses and David. Eli was the high priest for the people of Israel, a descendant of Aaron, Moses' brother. Based on a promise by his mother before he was born, Samuel had been dedicated to the Lord's service when he was no more than 4-5 years old. At this point in his life when he was serving as personal assistant to Eli, Samuel was probably in his early teens. Samuel had spent his entire life in the temple. These verses show Samuel was dedicated in his service to the temple and to God.

We are also given some striking info in these verses. "**In those days, the word of the Lord was rare; there were not many visions**" (v. 1). In the years after Moses and the entrance into the Promised Land, there was a long, slow drift from God. Make no mistake, God was still there, he never leaves. However, God's people simply didn't care to acknowledge him or listen to his Word. The Israelites, as they lived in a new land of freedom and established their homes, thought there were more important matters in life than to be dedicated to God's Word.

It is clear that Satan still bends our ears with the same temptation today; that there are things more important than the voice of the LORD. Today, maybe it is the Seahawks (or the Packers); tomorrow, it might be work or school; the next, it could be vacation or time with the family or on a hobby. "**In those days,**" we are told, "**the word of the Lord was rare.**" What about in these days; would the same be written about your interaction with the Word? Does our time and dedication show that there is nothing that could be of higher value than the message that God gives to us in his Word?

In his young life of dedication to the Lord, few would question whether Samuel valued the word of the LORD. But listening to the LORD also meant more. As we look at vv. 4-6, we hear this: "**4) Then the LORD called Samuel. Samuel answered, 'Here I am.' 5) 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. 6) 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."

As we look at those words, we probably shake our heads in wonder, how could Samuel miss the Lord's call? I suppose it could have been a variety of reasons. Maybe it was part humility: Samuel couldn't believe that God would speak to him, a young man, a helper in the temple. Maybe it was part doubt: that God could or would speak to his people. After all, it hadn't happened often since the time of Moses. It could have been some of that, but we know that at least part of the problem was uncertainty. Verse 7 tells us this: **"7) Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD: The word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him."**

Without context, that verse could mean a bunch of different things, even that Samuel did not yet have faith or knowledge of God and his promises. But we know that Samuel was raised by a faithful believer who taught him the Word and told him of the promises of God; Samuel knew the Lord as far as belief. **So, verse 7 must mean that Samuel did not yet know the voice of God.** Therefore, when God called, how could he recognize what he had never heard or experienced before? It seems obvious: But to hear what God was saying to him, Samuel had to recognize that the LORD was in fact speaking to him.

And Samuel learned that lesson with a little help from Eli, **"8) 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. 9) 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."** And when he was finally led to recognize that it was God who was speaking, Samuel had a humble response which we see in the last part of our text. **10) The LORD came and stood there, calling as at the other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" Then Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."**

When Samuel was finally ready to listen, God spoke...in a powerful way. He called Samuel to be prophet, priest, and leader for the people of Israel. He gave Samuel a unique role; a role that came when Samuel listened to the LORD.

As God called to Samuel, he also calls to us. Do you know the Lord's voice; do you recognize his call; how well do you listen when God speaks to you?

Recognizing the voice of the LORD was something that a young man named Martin struggled with, just like Samuel. When Martin Luther was a student at the University of Erfurt, he was reading through this story from Samuel's life and he became completely absorbed. How he wished that he could be Samuel and hear the Lord speak directly to him.

How often haven't you had that same wish? How often haven't you been frustrated with uncertainties; how often haven't you been stressed over decisions; how often haven't you lamented not having answers, and said, "Lord, just tell me! Just tell me what your plans are; just tell me what decision to make; just tell me how this is going to work out. Lord, speak to me as you did to Samuel!"

What we need to learn was a lesson that Luther needed to learn. And what Luther had to learn was a lesson that Samuel had to learn. The Lord does speak; his people just need to learn to listen to his voice.

Luther learned that lesson in the quiet of his study, where he finally discovered that God spoke to him - that God speaks to all of us - as he did to Samuel. Sure, the mode has changed - from spoken voice to written word, but God speaks. He speaks to each of us directly through his Word, he tells us of the love that he has for each one of us, he tells us of the plans that he has for each of us, he tells us how he wants each of us to live as we go through this life. It was that discovery that triggered Luther's lifelong devotion to the Word of God.

And if we also want to hear what God has to say, we have to dedicate time to listening. That means carving out 15-20 minutes each day to read a section of Scripture and consider what God is saying; that means talking about the sermon with your spouse on the way home; that means asking your kids about the Bible lessons that they hear at church and school. The more time we spend in the Word, the more we will recognize and hear God speaking to us.

God's voice, his words, his call to each of us is right there in his Word. May God give us patience and understanding to hear his voice as he calls to us in his Word; may he give us dedication to his Word; may he give us humility to slow down and say, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening!" Amen.