

Scripture:

1 Samuel 3:1-21

“Speak Lord, for your servant is listening.”

God is always speaking ----- the question is ----- who is listening?

It's often the listening that makes the difference.

Again -----

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It's often the listening that makes the difference.

A little background to our passage for today ----

Elkanah and Hannah are blessed with a son --- Samuel.

Hannah had been barren and humbly petitioned the Lord for a son ---- and she promised --- should she be blessed with a son ----- that she would take him and dedicate him to the Lord and leave him in the temple for the priests to tend to his upbringing.

And so it was --- the Lord blessed Hannah with a son --- and once he was weaned --- he was presented at the temple --- and then left there for God to do with him --- as God so chose.

All of this comes in the 2 chapters before our reading from 1 Samuel today.

And we pick it up in chapter 3 with Samuel living in the temple at Shiloh --- ---- under the care of the frail and aging high priest Eli.

And so it is --- as verse 1 says --- that as Samuel --- “ministered before the Lord under Eli” ----- that God finally calls upon him.

And of course eventually Samuel rises to be not only a highly respected prophet and judge ---- indeed the last of the great judges of Israel ---- but he also goes on to become the chief religious authority in Israel.

But for now we find him teen aged --- in the temple ---- under the care of Eli
---- not yet aware of just who God is and how He works.

Verse 7 reads --- “Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord: The word of the
Lord had not yet been revealed to him.”

And so --- as Samuel puts his head down to sleep --- the Lord calls him.

Samuel ---- not yet knowing God --- never having had an intimate
experience with Him ----- mistakes God’s voice for that of Eli.

So up he gets --- and off to Eli’s quarters he heads ---- saying --- “Here I am;
you called me.”

And of course Eli --- sound asleep --- never having called Samuel -----
simply says ---- “I did not call; go back and lie down.”

And as we just heard --- this goes on a second --- and a third time -----
before Eli realizes that it must be God calling Samuel.

So finally he says to Samuel --- in verse 9 ----- “Go and lie down, and if he
calls you say ----- “Speak Lord, for your servant is listening.”

As verse 2 indicates ----- Eli was old and failing.

“... Eli, whose eyes were becoming so weak that he could barely see...” ---
it says.

Failing in one regard ----- his ability to see ----- Eli remains gifted in others -
---- able to sense God’s voice ----- even if it wasn’t calling him.

So often ----- like Eli ----- we are limited in certain ways ---- and at the
same time gifted in others.

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same time gifted in others.

Eli's eyes failed him ----- Eli's ability to restrain and discipline his sons failed him ----- and yet right to the very end of his life Eli somehow remains faithfully in tune with God's voice.

At first glance it would appear that a good and faithful summary of 1 Samuel chapter 3 might go something like -----

“So you see when God calls ---- as he did young Samuel --- we are to respond and listen just as Samuel did.”

Or ---- “so you see God chooses as God chooses ---- here God choose a young boy to speak to --- so whether big or small --- young or old ----- God can choose ---- and use us.”

As good and faithful as these points are ----- they don't really cut to the heart of the passage.

As is so often the case ----- the heart of the passage is all about God first ---- ----- God speaking ---- God's initiative.

I began this message with these words ----- these observations -----

God is always speaking ----- the question is ----- who is listening?

and -----

It's often the listening that makes the difference.

And I said them in terms of importance ----- God acting and speaking first - ----- and then ----- someone listening.

Well despite the tendency to focus on Samuel as the one listening to God in this passage ---- Eli is truly the great listener.

Firstly ---- Eli is able to discern that it must be God calling to Samuel and so instructs Samuel as to how to respond ---- “Speak, Lord, your servant is listening.” ----- he says.

And then even more importantly there is Eli's response to the devastating news that God shares with Samuel.

The news that basically says ---- “As for you and yours Eli ----- I’m going to kill you all off for your lack of obedience and honour.”

Indeed for a more detailed account as to what God has in store for the house of Eli than we have in verses 11 to 14 from our passage today ---- all we need do is turn to the 10 verses immediately preceding our reading this morning.

The last 10 verses of 1 Samuel chapter 2 is a rather horrifying account of what God has in store for the house of Eli ----- verse 33 includes these harsh words --- “all of your descendants will die in the prime of life.”

“all of your descendants will die in the prime of life.” ----- including the death of his two sons ---- Hophni and Phinehas on the same day ---- harsh.

Samuel --- thanks to Eli’s guidance ---- responds to God’s call and listens to the voice of God --- and the news is harsh ---- horrific even if you’re Eli.

And yet --- after Samuel shares this news --- Eli’s response is one of the most faithful and powerful responses in the whole of scripture in the face of such personally devastating news.

Eli responds in verse 18 ----- “He is the Lord; let him do what is good in his eyes.”

“He is the Lord; let him do what is good in his eyes.”

How many of us can honestly say that we would be capable of a response like this in the face of such personally devastating news.

Eli directs Samuel as to how to respond to God’s calling.

Samuel listens ---- and then the next morning Eli asks to hear what God has shared.

And the news is horrific.

“I’m going to judge and punish Eli and his household ----- I’m going to kill off all of Eli’s household in their prime ---- and I’m going to replace his

claim to the priesthood with a new lineage --- removing Eli's line forever." -
 ---- is the news.

And upon firm request from Eli not to hide anything that God revealed to Samuel ---- Samuel shares what God spoke ----- hiding nothing from Eli as verse 18 says.

Now it would be completely understandable if Eli had of stormed off in embarrassment.

It would have been completely understandable had Eli turned and given Samuel and ear full --- shooting the messenger as the saying goes --- saying something like ----

"Now listen here you little scoundrel --- who are you --- you who didn't even recognize God's voice --- who are you to tell me that it's over for me and my household --- that we will no longer be the high priests and religious authorities that God promised to me."

It would have been completely understandable if Eli had of responded with anger towards God --- saying something like ----

"God I tried ----- I tried to subdue my sons ---- I knew just as well as you did that they were blasphemous and disrespectful ----- despising me and you -- --- making the temple a place of personal opportunity and disgrace instead of honour ---- praise --- and worship."

But he doesn't.

"He is the Lord; let him do what is good in his eyes." ----- Eli says.

"He is the Lord; let him do what is good in his eyes."

Talk about listening to God and taking it all in stride faithfully.

Imagine God coming to us and saying ---

" I am going to kill off your whole family ----- and in their prime by the way --- and I'm also going to take away from you all that I had promised you earlier --- and just to cap it off I'll spare you for now but I'm going to destroy your sight and sap your strength before long so get ready."

Because that's essentially what god says to Eli.

Picking it up mid way through verse 32 from 1Samuel 2 -----

“...Although good will be done to Israel, no one in your family line will ever reach old age. Every one of you that I do not cut off from serving at my altar I will spare only to destroy your sight and sap your strength, and all your descendants will die in the prime of life.”

Brutal.

How many of us on hearing news such as this would respond with ---- “He is the Lord; let him do what is good in his eyes.” --- not many.

God is always speaking ----- the question is ----- who is listening?

And ----- It’s often the listening that makes the difference.

To say -----“Speak Lord for your servant is listening.”

As Eli does when he says ---- “He is the Lord; let him do what is good in his eyes.” ----- is a remarkably faithful response.

Yes Eli is failing ----- getting old --- losing his sight ----- likely less and less able to fulfill the duties required of him as high priest.

And yet ---- he remains faithfully open to and attentive to God’s voice ---- even when that voice brings devastating news.

It’s no wonder that Samuel rises to be a religious authority in Israel without parallel.

It’s no wonder that Samuel is the one at the helm when Israel moves to a new form of government ---- moving away from rule by Judges and ---- transitioning to rule by King.

And it’s no wonder that when Israel’s first King is chosen --- Saul ---- it is Samuel who is responsible for anointing him.

And it’s no wonder that after Saul is rejected and a new king is needed ---- it is once again Samuel who is sent to find and then anoint this new King ---- young David.

With such a great and faithful mentor ---- and teacher in Eli.

It's no wonder that Samuel --- is able to listen to God's directives so clearly.

Regardless of the personal cost ----- and it was huge for Eli --- especially near the end of his life ---- regardless of the personal cost ----- Eli is able to listen to God when He speaks.

Very few people indeed are capable of setting aside personal wants ---- needs ----- desires ----- and agenda's ----- and listen to God like Eli did.

And of course we see this same ability in Samuel later on in chapter 8.

Initially opposed to rule by King ----- despite the elders being for it --- Samuel is able to hear God's voice speaking and moves to the reality that it is indeed God's will --- and not just that of the people --- to establish a monarchy for Israel and anoint a King --- doing away with the old model of judges.

So yes ----- Samuel listens and responds.

So yes summaries of this passage such as --- "So you see when God calls we are to respond and listen as Samuel did."

And ---- "So you see God chooses as God chooses ---- here He choose a young boy to speak to --- so big or small --- young or old ----- God can choose ---- and use us." ---- do have some truth to them.

But in this passage ----- it is really Eli ----- who listens.

Eli is the one called to do the hard listening ---- and difficult discerning.

It's Eli's ability and willingness to listen that makes the difference here.

He could have simply pushed Samuel off and said stop dreaming and go to bed --- but he doesn't --- he knows something is up with Samuel having been awoken repeatedly.

He could have simply said --- “That’s what you thought you heard young boy” --- after God speaks to Samuel --- “Now go back to God and listen more carefully you’re new at this.” ----- but he doesn’t.

God doesn’t always give us messages or news --- or circumstances that we like --- or find agreeable.

He certainly didn’t give Eli news he found particularly agreeable --- “I’m going to kill off your family in their prime --- and replace you with someone else as high priest.”

But Eli ----- listened.

And because of this --- Samuel learned to listen too.

“Speak, Lord, your servant is listening.”

Eli counseled Samuel.

“Speak, Lord, your servant is listening.”

And Eli accepted what God spoke ----- responding with the great and powerful and inspiring words ----- words to live by ----

“He is the Lord; let him do what is good in his eyes.”

God is always speaking ----- the question is ----- who is listening?

and -----

It’s often the listening that makes the difference.

“Speak, Lord, your servant is listening.” ---- matters.

And ----- “Speak, Lord, your servant is listening.” ----- matters --- precisely because what we hear ----- may change our world.

Amen.