

January 14th, 2018

Scripture:

Psalms 139:1-18

1 Samuel 3:1-21

“God is patient, God is persistent!”

A friend of mine ---- considerably younger than me ---- newly married ---- recently posted a meme ---- an image with a message ---- an electronic poster if you like ----- on Facebook.

And the image was of one person craning their neck trying to hear what someone was saying to them.

A person craning their neck --- you know turning their head in the direction the voice is coming from ---- and lifting their ear for optimal hearing possibility.

And the caption read ----- “I recently realized that 80% of conversations since I’ve been married are me yelling ----- “Are you talking to me? ---- I can’t hear you!” --- as my partner says something from another in the house.”

“Are you talking to me? ---- I can’t hear you!” --- as my partner says something from another room in the house.”

Can anyone relate to this?

Anyone ever have this happen to them?

Someone talking to you from another room in the house ----- a voice bouncing off the walls in another room in the house ----- and you think ---- “Are they talking to me? ----- I can’t really hear them!”

And there are all the slight variations on how one might respond to someone saying something just out of earshot --- in the other room.

There’s the ---- “Hold on I can’t hear you I’m just washing my hands right now.”

“Hold on, I’m on the phone right now.”

“Hold on the dishwashers on ---- I can’t hear you.”

“Just a second the kettle’s boiling and I can’t hear you.”

“Can you hang on a minute the washing machine --- or the TV ---- or something ---- is drowning you out.”

“What was that? --- I can’t hear you? --- hold on.”

“Was that you ---- did you say something to me? --- I’m just reading a book here ---- hold on a minute.”

“What was that...?”

Anyone relate to this one?

I’m going to assume by all the shaking heads that many of us have experienced this before.

Something happening ---- someone speaking --- but we’re not sure if they’re speaking to us ---- let alone what they’re even saying.

Well that’s kind of like what is happening in our scripture reading today.

Young Samuel is trying to sleep and someone keeps talking to him from another room.

Picking it up at verse 2 -----

“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 house 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.”

Samuel hears a voice calling from another room --- so he gets up and goes to his teacher ---- Eli.

When he arrives Eli says --- “What no --- I didn’t call you Samuel ---- go back to bed.”

And this happens 3 times before Eli finally realizes what is happening.

Eli eventually figures out that it is God who is calling out to young Samuel - -- so he gives him some help.

“Go and lie down” --- Eli says to Samuel --- “and if you hear the voice calling again simply say --- “Speak Lord for your servant is listening.”

“Go and lie down ----- and if you hear the voice calling again simply say --- “Speak Lord for your servant is listening.”

And of course this is exactly what happens.

God calls Samuel again --- and instead of running to Eli --- this time just as Eli instructed him --- he says ----- “Speak Lord --- for your servant is listening.”

And then comes the interesting part.

And then comes the tricky part --- God speaks.

Interesting because of course it’s always interesting when God speaks.

But also tricky because what God says will be difficult for Samuel to share with Eli.

And it’s tricky or difficult ---- because it is a word --- and ultimately an action ---- of harsh harsh judgment against Eli and his family.

It was difficult for Samuel to know when it was God who was speaking to him.

And then once he realized it was indeed God speaking ---- it was a challenge for him to share what God said ---- because what god said was harsh and judgmental.

It was hard for Samuel to know when it was God speaking to Him.

And then once he realized it was God speaking ---- it was a challenge to share what God said because it was bleak and disturbing.

Thankfully old Eli ---- was faithful and humble --- and open.

Thankfully Eli wanted to hear what God was saying even if the message wasn't all that favourable to him personally.

Even after Samuel shares with him the calamity that God is planning on doing --- inflicting dreadful calamities on Eli and his family ----- Eli responds favourably saying ---- “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.”

God speaks ---- and there are those willing to listen.

God could have given up on trying to talk to Samuel.

But He didn't.

He kept on trying ---- 1 --- 2 ----- 3 ---- 4 times at least ----- according to scripture today.

And maybe this wasn't the first time God had tried.

Maybe it was 4 times this night --- and maybe there were other nights as well.

Our passage begins with ---- “In those days the word of the Lord was rare --- there were not many visions.”

And it also says --- “The lamp of God had not yet gone out.”

On the one hand ----- so rare was the sound of God speaking that no one recognized it anymore.

And then at the same time ---- despite this rather sad and disappointing news ---- that the word of the Lord was rare ---- there is also a deep sense of hope.

Even though the lamp of God's presence may just have been a slight flicker rising out of the embers ---- there is still a flicker --- it's not totally out yet.

And of course as we soon see ----- God turn this slight flicker into a raging flame.

In the opening verses of the passage the Word of the Lord is presented as a very rare thing --- something that isn't happening ---- or at the very least something that the people are not picking up on or paying attention to.

But by the end of the passage this has all changed and God's word is alive and well.

As verse 19 says ----- "The Lord was with Samuel as he grew up --- and let none of Samuels' words fall to the ground."

And then skipping ahead a few verses ---- "The Lord continued to appear at Shiloh ----- and there he revealed Himself through Samuel through his word."

A flickering --- fading ember at the beginning --- ends up a raging fire.

God is patient ---- God is persistent.

Thankfully God continued to speak ----- and God continued to reveal Himself.

And thankfully somebody listened.

And of course what happened with Samuel and Eli in scripture today ----- still happens today.

It can still be a challenge to identify God's Word --- it can still be a challenge to differentiate God's voice from other voices.

And --- our natural sinfulness can create a great challenge in distinguishing between our own self-interest and the voice of God.

Sometimes it can be extremely difficult to put aside our pride and self confidence ---- and self assuredness ----- and simply let God speak.

Like Samuel ---- we too can sometimes be unsure of who is calling us.

Like Samuel ----- we too can think it is someone else instead of God who is speaking to us.

But the great hope we have in God ----- includes that He will always provide a way ----- a helper --- a word of encouragement --- a sign --- clarity ---- so that we can come to realize that it is indeed Him speaking.

The great hope we have in Jesus Christ --- includes that God is patient ---- and that God is persistent ----- and won't give up until we finally get it.

Just as the lamp of God's presence hadn't gone out completely in scripture today --- so the lamp of God's presence --- God's voice speaking to us today ----- hasn't faded out completely either.

Yes it can be rare --- as verse 1 from scripture indicates --- yes it can be rare that the Word of the Lord is spoken or heard --- but thankfully it does still happen.

God is patient ---- and God is persistent.

God still speaks.

God's love for us is powerful.

And God's love for us is so profound ---- that He won't give up or tire out -- -- He will carry on until someone finally hears and responds.

“Speak Lord --- for your servant is listening.” ----- Samuel eventually says.

There is great hope in knowing that in light of Christ we can put aside our selfish ambition --- our pride --- our self reliance and self assuredness ---- and let God speak to and through us.

We can still join Samuel and say ----“Speak Lord for your servant is listening.”

And we can do this precisely because ----- “God is patient!” ----- and ----- because ---- “God is persistent!”

And we can do this because God’s love is so profound and so deep for us that He continues to reveal Himself to us --- and He continues to speak to us.

Spiritual darkness can sometimes threaten to block out --- and corrupt the light of God’s presence and God’s saving Word that is Jesus Christ.

But the Good News is ----- the beauty --- goodness and truth of God --- still shines brightly through the corruption ---- and through the racism ---- and through the greed --- and through all the foolishness of this world.

The light of God’s love still shines brightly ---- and nothing of this world can ever snuff it out.

God is patient --- and God is persistent.

Thankfully God never gives up on us.

Thankfully the lamp of the Lord never goes out.

Thankfully ----- there is always at least one voice that still says --- “Speak Lord --- for your servant is listening.”

And so we are grateful.

And so we are blessed.

Thankfully there are still those who submit to God ---- falling at the foot of the cross saying ---- “Speak Lord ----- for your servant is listening.”

And so we are grateful.

And so we are blessed.

“Speak Lord ----- for your people are listening.”

Amen.