

I Samuel 3:1-20
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Listen & Hear

May the God...

Good Morning!

Listen. Listen. Listen. Open your ears so that you may hear. Sit yourself down to listen. God is calling us now, as we are on the verge, in a time a chaos and inequity, God is calling. Do you hear?

The books of Samuel take place during an extremely interesting time in the history of the Israelites. Moses has died, they are now entrenched in the Promised Land. Although it flows with milk and honey, many of the priests are corrupt, the people are lawless, some find themselves longing for a temporal King. Time-wise it is at a pivotal halfway point between Abraham's call and the birth of Jesus. It's about 1000 years before the Common Era. And along comes Hanna, a faithful woman, who was bereft for she was unable to bear a child. Every year she went to the temple in Shiloh to pray. One year the priest, Eli, sees her praying, her lips moving, her tears trailing down her cheeks. He's taken aback by her fervor and mistakenly presumes she is drunk. He confronts her.

She replies, "No, no sir, I am so desperately unhappy because of the pain of my empty womb. Every year I come and ask God for God to bless me with a little one."

Eli takes in all of her sadness, bearing witness to her faithfulness and says, "Go now in peace and may the God of Israel, give you what you ask."

And God did. Less than a year later, Hanna gave birth to her son, named him Samuel and dedicated him to God. After he was weaned, she brings him back to the temple to be with Eli and to serve God his entire life.

This then is where our story this morning picks up. Samuel is older, now a young boy and he is faithfully serving the temple, sleeping next to the ark of the covenant, the holy of holies, when he hears his name, "Samuel. Samuel."

Three times he gets up and runs to the nearby room where Eli the priest is asleep. Twice Eli, annoyed, tells him to go back to bed. "I did not call you," he says. The third time Samuel hears his name called and comes into Eli's room, Eli gets it.

Even though it was a time when the word of God was rare and visions were not widespread, after the third time Eli understands. This is God. (Imagine how long it would take one of us to come to the conclusion that the voice in the night was God?!)

This time Eli says to Samuel, “It is God who is calling you. Go and lay down again, and if you hear the voice once more, say to voice, ‘Speak Lord for your servant is listening.’” And again God called Samuel and this time he does not run to Eli. Instead he says, “Speak Lord for your servant is listening.”

And God speaks. God tells Samuel that God is about to do something that will make the ears tingle of anyone who is listening. Among other things I will bring down the house of Eli, (Eli’s sons are priests and they are unfaithful, blasphemous and Eli, who knows all about what they are doing and saying, Eli does nothing to stop them.)

After listening to God, Samuel stays in his room, lying close to the Ark of the Covenant until late morning. He is afraid to tell Eli, what the Lord had said. But Eli calls to him and ask him to speak the truth. So Samuel tells him all. Eli, chastened, says, “Let it be as God has said.”

Samuel grows, Samuel becomes a trusted prophet of God; eventually anointing Saul the first king of Israel and then David, the greatest King of Israel.

Interesting story from 3000 years ago, but you may be asking, what in heaven’s name might it have to do with us? Us. Here, a week and a half after our nation’s capital was ransacked and desecrated. Eleven days since our republic, our democracy, and our leaders were imperiled by a riotous crowd created by lies, half-truths and conspiracies, promulgated by politicians who chose to ignore facts and dispatched into action by an amoral self-absorbed president and more than a few right wing hate groups.

What does this story have to do with us?

I am struck by a chaotic society, not satisfied with God as a leader but longing for a King to tell them what to do. I am struck by a corrupt order of religious people who claim to be of God, but instead continuously blaspheme in word and deed.

I am struck by people of faith who need to hear God call them four different times before they say, “Speak Lord for your servant is listening.” I am struck and filled with some hope that Samuel, took a bit of time to reflect before he acts. He does not run in immediately to Eli’s room to tell him of God’s words, instead he waits. He waits until Eli asks to hear.

I am struck that Samuel, grows strong, speaks God’s words and the people listen, and the world changes, bit by bit. Friends, on this Martin Luther King weekend and for the next few weeks, I long for us to be quick to pray, attentive in our listening and slower to act.

Let’s talk about listening: who are we listening to? People who hold the same opinions we do? I certainly enjoy doing this because it makes me feel better about my own beliefs, but do I gain a different perspective? Or I could listen to people who espouse racist beliefs and nefarious white supremacist views? I need to do a bit of this, because it

is important to know what people are saying, but too much of it fuels me with deep, deep anger and I think prevents me from doing the hard work of beginning to understand why a wide swath of our country is so very angry, and so very afraid of diversity, inclusion.

Why are so many people afraid that Dr. King's dream for our country may be realized? Why are so many of us who claim to be Christian afraid of having power and access to power equally distributed across all races and classes? Why do so many of us who follow Christ believe that our world is an apple pie, where if you get a big piece, mine will be small?

What if we slowed down and took the time and asked these questions in our own families and then just listened to our relatives answer. What if we took the time to listen, to hear, to pause, to reflect, to ground ourselves in God, to embrace God's time and thoughtfully, carefully create our response to the chaos.

Let us not add our adrenaline to this system. Let us listen long and hard before we speak. Let us stay away from all places of public demonstration. Let us listen as German Theologian, Karl Barth said, "With a bible in one hand and a newspaper in the other." (If he were alive now, I'm sure he'd be on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram.)

In this day and age in another time when God's word seems rare and visions are not widespread, let us be the ones who sit up and listen, who seek understanding, and new insights. Let us be the ones who spend our nights waiting for God's Holy Word. Knowing that when we do listen, when we do hear, when we do digest and learn, then the time will come for us to act.

We are people of faith. God acts through us, loves through us. God has acted in the past and God will act again, through us.