

## SPEAK,LORD, YOUR SERVANT IS LISTENING

There's that one line in the story of the calling of Samuel that stands out. It's this one, "THE WORD OF THE LORD WAS RARE IN THOSE DAYS".

That's a few thousand years ago. In about the years 1100 to 1000 BC

And the word of the Lord was rare in those days. Samuel's mother, Hannah, who felt blessed to finally have a child, had dedicated him to God and sent him to live in the temple where a priest named Eli lived. He was about 12 years old.

Samuel was lying down most likely trying to sleep, We know what that's like.

And God kept waking him up.

But Samuel didn't realize it was God. He thought it was Eli. He heard his name called----- Samuel, Samuel. He ran to Eli saying, Here I am for you called me. Eli said, "I did not call you."

It happened three times.

After the third time, Eli figures it out. It is the Lord calling Samuel. So he tells him to go and lie down and when the Lord calls again, say,

"Speak Lord, your servant is listening.

So that's what Samuel does. But when God Speaks this time, it's a word that people may not want to hear. It's a word of judgement. Eli's sons have blasphemed God.

And God is about to hold them responsible. Samuel is called to speak as a prophet

The silence of God and the absence of visions were not just a feeling, but as Samuel would describe it, his day was a period of political anarchy in Israel's history when every person did what was right in his own eyes.

When people had no regard for the lord and were not listening to God. And God was silent. And visions were rare.

It's a chilling thought to think God might stop speaking because of our not listening. Perhaps God was saying, I have answered your prayers and now grant you the freedom you have craved to not listen to me.

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But whatever the reason, the word of the Lord was rare in those days, and so it may not be at all a surprise that when the Lord calls Samuel, he doesn't think it's the Lord at all, but he thinks it's Eli calling him. It must be Eli.

What happens is that when Samuel does finally answer God by saying, "Speak Lord, your servant is listening." And Samuel is called to be a prophet to speak for God.

Later he will anoint Saul as King and after that he will anoint King David.

It's interesting that Samuel did not seek God. It says he didn't know God. Yet God seeks Samuel out,

And even though Samuel doesn't recognize God's voice, God calls him to be a prophet to speak for God.

Even though God works and speaks in mysterious ways, God's purposes have not changed.

We may not be called to be prophets, but God seeks us out and calls us to speak and work for God in whatever way we can.

As Hebrews says, in days gone by, God spoke to us through the prophets, but in these last days, God has spoken through us through a Son. God has spoken to us finally and fully in Jesus and in the Scriptures.

God has spoken and continues to speak whether or not we are listening.

I believe that through the years, God has spoken in mysterious ways and surprised others just as much as Samuel.

So Jesus would say in the Bible, Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear.

Tomorrow is Martin Luther King Jr. Day and in another time and place, he experienced God speaking and leading him.

Hearing God's voice was critical for the prophetic witness of Dr. King.

In January 1956, during the Montgomery bus boycott, he received a threatening phone call late at night.

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He couldn't sleep. He went to his kitchen and took his "problem to God."

He was at a breaking point of exhaustion and about to give up.

He spoke to God and said that he experienced the Divine and "could hear the quiet assurance of an inner voice, saying, 'Stand up for righteousness, stand up for truth. God will be at your side forever.'"

His fears and uncertainty ceased because God spoke and gave him "inner calm.

God provided the interior resources for him to do his social justice work. He needed God to speak first. Then he could act. He listened prayerfully then proclaimed prophetically.

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We are in the season of Epiphany. In this season, we are reminded of the light that has come into our world. We are also reminded that God isn't in any way done with the world.

God is still speaking. And God is still working in this world.

With our eyes and ears open, we see examples around us of how God has spoken.

For many of us, I think we can look back and see how God was involved in our lives. Maybe we were struggling with something and prayed to God about it and maybe sometime later, you realized that God had spoken to you in one way or another.

I have always liked Psalm 121, I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where will my help come.

My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

He will not let your foot be moved, he who watches over you will not slumber.

He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord is your keeper. The Lord is your shade at your right hand. The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night.

The Lord will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life.

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The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore.

Samuel heard God speak, Martin Luther King, Jr. heard it.

And someone like you and me, have heard God speak.

AS WE LISTEN, WE HEAR GOD SPEAKING TO US, CALLING US

TO SOMETHING NEW. Thanks be to God!

At this time, we invite you to the song based on the experience of Samuel called Here I Am Lord. We have sung it often from our hymnal.