

I Samuel 3:1-20
May 9, 2010

Your Servant is Listening

Oscar Wilde writes that “there is only one thing in the world worse than being talked about and that is not being talked about.” Couple of years ago one of our youth walked in the door on Sunday and we said to him, I’ll bet your ears were burning a minute ago; we were talking about you. His hands went to his ears checking for something unusual. He thought maybe his ears looked red or something, – so he quietly snuck into the rest room, to peak in the mirror. Ears weren’t the slightest bit unusual. Minutes later he came back to me – what’s wrong with my ears? I told him it was just an expression. Folks had been saying nice things about him.

Old Eli’s Ears must have been burning but when God spoke to the Boy Samuel, it wasn’t nice talk. God was telling him that Eli’s time as religious leader in Israel was over and Samuel’s time was coming. God even said to Samuel in his dream. Samuel, “I am about to do something in Israel that will make both ears of anyone who hears it tingle.”

Today at the 11:00 service, five youth will take vows and join our church as full adult members. Samuel was a few years younger than these youth when he heard God calling in the night. Two of our youth will be confirming

the promises their parents made at their baptisms when they were babies, so we call that Confirmation. Three of our youth, who were not baptized, having been nurtured in this church also feel God is calling them to discipleship. In this case we call it Commissioning. In each instance it's their decision. They hear God calling and they are answering. For many of us, this is an event that gets us to tingling.

Samuel's mother Hannah tried and tried to have a baby but a baby never came. Hannah prayed and prayed for a baby. For years she hoped and prayed. She even promised God that if she was given a child, she would dedicate his life to serving God. O this child Samuel was most welcome, heartily and joyfully greeted and raised with tender loving care and special affection. But Hannah remembered the promise she made to God. So when Samuel was about four years old, she sacrificed her motherhood and brought her only son to the priest Eli - for study and prayer for tutoring in the priesthood. Somehow she could see forward to a time when God would call her son for something great and she was able to leave him there to learn and to grow. It must have been hard for Samuel to be separated from his mother at age four, very often God asks us to do hard things.

Samuel lived with the priest Eli in the Temple and at night Samuel would

sleep in the very room that housed the Ark of the Covenant. According to scripture, the Ark of the Covenant was an ornately crafted and specially constructed box that held the original two tablets of the Ten Commandments. Hundreds of years old, It was a holy object of great importance to the people of Israel. There Samuel slept, right next to the very words of God - chiseled into stone. Many of us sleep within a few feet of a Bible and every once in a while we read them.

Early in the story we are told that the word of God was rare in those days; visions were not widespread. The spiritual vision of Priest Eli had also dimmed, blurred and become confused. I take that to mean that neither the people nor Eli were listening to God. Then just like today there were other voices. Media being what it is in our time, it may be even harder to listen for God's voice. Our ears tingle with the beat of the Ipod. The TV, and the internet out to us, but followers of Christ take the time to listen to the loving God who calls us by name.

Yet we read that the lamp of God had not yet gone out entirely. God's presence may have been ignored or blocked by people, but God had not withdrawn. For in the middle of the night, a voice is waiting to be heard, disturbing sleep, calling a child, a child who sleeps in the temple of God, near

the Ark near the lamp.

Theologically speaking, when God taps someone on the shoulder and says, "I've got a job for you;" the church describes it as a call. Not necessarily a phone call now, but none the less a call; A deep inner feeling that God is asking you to do something in particular. One of the ironies of the Christian faith is that God always calls during dinner or God calls late at night or in the middle of sleep. God is as pesky as a telephone solicitor. God is as persistent as a used car salesperson. God is more often than Junk mail and Spam. A call to do God's work always comes in the middle of something else. We are usually preoccupied, comfortable or at least used to a routine. The God of creation is the grand interrupter; the status quo wrecker; suddenly you hear your name. You poke at your ear, but God calls again.

In the middle of the night there was a call. The phone did not ring, but nonetheless Samuel knew that that call was for him. S-a-m-u-e-l, S-a-m-u-e-l, Samuel was eager to learn and eager to serve and he ran in to Eli's room and said Here I am, Here I am for you called me. And Eli sleepy and grumpy for being stirred in the middle of the night said; "I did not call. Go back and Lay down." Rumble grumble – kids, so much energy, murmurs Eli as he rolls over on his mat. Samuel was a good a boy so he went and laid down.

There was song on the Radio about ten years ago called Closing Time by Semisonic. There is a line that goes every new beginning comes from some other beginning's end. When you begin your work as a disciple of Christ, something else ends because your priorities change. You stop listening so much to other voices and you start focusing in on God's.

S-a-m-u-e-l, S-a-m-u-e-l, Samuel said oh that tricky Eli, he is just trying to see if I am a faithful servant of the Lord. He is testing me. Samuel got right up and quickly went in Eli's room again. "Here I am Sir; for you called me sir. What would you like me to do sir?". Reckon seckon breckon; like a grumbling Fred Flintstone, Eli dismisses Samuel with a huff. I did not call you Samuel. Go back and lie down again.

Sometimes when we answer the call, we are dismissed. Here, near the light, God calls Samuel to do something radical, radical enough to upset everyone in Israel. God calls Samuel to confront the way things are and to begin something new. Samuel it turns out was told that Eli's sons were blaspheming God and God's temple. Samuel was called to be a prophet, called to purify and reform the religious practices of his time. Prophets are listening servants who have the ability hear God's voice and the courage to act and act boldly. Prophets feel the fire of God in their bones and they put these

feelings into words and actions. As we can see from the lives of prophets in the Bible; it is not safe to be near the fire of God, but prophets are people who are willing to risk personal comfort, to speak the truth to power. Prophets are people who are willing to risk reputation and safety in order to stand up for what they believe. Prophets almost always face stiff opposition, sometimes violent opposition and yet they stay the course.

S-a-m-u-e-l, S-a-m-u-e-l, it happened again and this time Samuel shot right into Eli's room and said again Here I am sir - what do you wish? And this time Eli, having been schooled in the ways of God, Eli, even in his old age remembered some things that his corrupt sons had not quite helped him to forget. Eli in some rediscovered wisdom, realized that this bright-eyed young Samuel was being called by God - in a dream, in a vision. Oh Samuel; I believe the call is for you. Samuel, come here boy – listen carefully to me. This voice you hear – its not me – but it is real. We are in the temple and the voice belongs to God. If God calls again, say to God in a most earnest and humble way - speak Lord for your servant is listening.

These are some of the bravest words you will ever utter; speak Lord for your servant is listening. A lot of things in our world are wondrous, amazing, peaceful and beautiful. A lot of things in our world are nasty, addictive, violent

and ugly. The trouble is a lot of the time at first glance it is hard to tell the difference. As your grandmother told you, all that glitters is not gold. The nasty violent and ugly is real slick about promoting its view. The world is full of spin doctors. Disciples practice their listening skills so they can tune out the static.

We ask people when they become disciples; who is your Lord and Savior? Jesus Christ. Do you trust in Him? Will you listen for God's voice? Will you tune out the static? I do and I will? Will you be Christ's faithful disciple obeying his word and showing his love? Do you promise to try and reform the world and be prophetic? I do.

Oscar Wilde writes that "there is only one thing in the world worse than being talked about and that is not being talked about." If you live out the faith to which you have been called by name; Believe me, people will talk about you. And that just might be a good thing.