

St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church – Watertown, WI  
Pastor Mark Gartner  
Sermon for Epiphany 2 – January 15<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>, 2009

### **1 Samuel 3:1-10**

**The boy Samuel ministered before the LORD under Eli. In those days the word of the LORD was rare; there were not many visions. <sup>2</sup> One night Eli, whose eyes were becoming so weak that he could barely see, was lying down in his usual place. <sup>3</sup> The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was. <sup>4</sup> Then the LORD called Samuel. Samuel answered, "Here I am." <sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> Again the LORD called, "Samuel!" And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." "My son," Eli said, "I did not call; go back and lie down." <sup>7</sup> Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD: The word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him. <sup>8</sup> The LORD called Samuel a third time, and Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." Then Eli realized that the LORD was calling the boy. <sup>9</sup> So Eli told Samuel, "Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place. <sup>10</sup> The LORD came and stood there, calling as at the other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" Then Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."**

Dear Friends in Christ,

Our Savior Jesus spent a lot of time pointing out little children to his disciples as examples worth following. When his disciples were arguing about which of them was the greatest, Jesus put a little child before them and said **"I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."** (Mt 18:3-4) On another occasion people were bringing their children to Jesus to have him touch them and bless them. You remember how the disciples became indignant, that these parents were wasting the great teacher's valuable time. Again he rebuked them for their foolishness. Jesus pointed out repeatedly what great examples of simple, trusting faith children often give us. Today we have another great example in the story of the calling of Samuel. We want to remind ourselves today to imitate the childlike faith of Samuel. We want to learn from his example to say, just as he did,

#### **Theme: Speak Lord, Your Servant Is Listening**

- 1. Acknowledge the Lord's Words**
- 2. Listen to the Lord's Words**

What a great story! Samuel is sleeping in the tabernacle in the very room where the Ark of the Covenant was kept—the Ark above which God had appeared any number of times, the Ark that symbolized his very presence. Just before dawn, just before the night's oil supply ran out in the lamps that were to be burned from dusk to dawn, Samuel is startled from his sleep by a voice calling out his name. As he awakens he calls out "Here I am!" But he doesn't get an answer, so he runs into aged Eli's room, assuming the old man needed him to get him something or do something. But Eli hadn't called him, so he tells Samuel to go back to bed. The same thing happens again, and then a third time.

Give Eli some credit. Eli is not known in Scripture for being the most spiritual man. In fact he was best known for being a really lousy parent. His sons Hophni and Phineas are two of the ultimate bad guys in the Bible. They would bully and steal from anyone who came to the temple with a sacrifice, and they fornicated with the women who served at the entrance of the tabernacle. God told Eli that it was his fault. God said to Eli that he honored his sons more than God. So it's kind of a pleasant surprise to see that Eli figured out what was happening. Eli still had enough faith to realize that God could be calling Samuel.

So the third time he tells Samuel to go back to bed, he tells him what he should do if he hears the voice again. **“Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, ‘Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.’”** As for Samuel, he was still a boy, probably about 12 or 13 at this point. He had literally been raised in the Temple. His mother Hanna, you remember, had dedicated him to the Lord's service the day he was weaned. She was keeping the vow she had made before he was ever born: **“O LORD Almighty, if you will only look upon your servant's misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the LORD for all the days of his life....”** (1 Sam 1:11) There in the tabernacle he grew up. He spent his days learning the ropes, so to speak, helping Eli with all the everyday tasks, opening up in the morning, closing at night, keeping oil in the lamps, helping with the sacrifices and incense. He learned to know God's Word and his people's history from the books of the Torah. Sadly, he also learned how horribly Eli's sons acted.

No, he may not have recognized that it was the Lord calling him right away. After all, our text says **“In those days the word of the LORD was rare; there were not many visions.”** This sort of thing didn't happen every day. But look at his humble attitude. Middle of the night or not, when he heard his name he was ready to jump up and do whatever was asked of him. Despite what he knew of Eli's dreadful family, he still ran to assist Eli and honored and obeyed him. When Eli told him what to do, he didn't question him. He went straight back to bed and eagerly waited, hoping his name might be called out just one more time.

And God did call his name again. This time our text says **“The LORD came and stood there, calling as at the other times, ‘Samuel! Samuel!’ Then Samuel said, ‘Speak, for your servant is listening.’”** Samuel was ready to acknowledge that the God of heaven can talk to men on earth—and women and boys and girls too. (And by the way, 13 years earlier, the Lord himself had appeared to his mother Hannah to tell her she would give birth to Samuel.)

What does all this have to do with us? God still talks to boys and girls and men and women. No, he doesn't talk to us the way he spoke with Samuel—face to face. But he most certainly does talk to us. He talks to us through his Holy Scriptures. He speaks to us through the Sacraments. He talks to us through his ministers. And what does he say? Well, the very first thing God ever said to you was the very first thing God said to Samuel. In your Baptism, God called out your name. He called you by name and said “I baptize *you* in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” You are now my own dear child. I'm making you my own special servant.

And God has been speaking to you ever since. In his Word he tells you that you're a sinner, that you were born a lost and condemned creature. He points out to us how unworthy we are to be his servants and his children. He tells us that we don't deserve his grace any more than Hophni and Phineas did. But he also tells us we're forgiven. He tells us that his Son Jesus lived a perfect life of service to God in our place. God tells us that his dear Son died for our sins and the sins of the whole world when he was crucified on Calvary. And he comes and talks to us one on one in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper and says: *“You, yes you! I mean your sins are forgiven through my holy precious blood and my innocent sufferings and death. That's why I'm preparing a place for you in heaven!”*

We want to share Samuel's attitude toward God's Word when he speaks to us. We want to be ready to jump up and run to him. We want to speak with the reverence and awe of a child standing before the high priest: “Here I am! Please speak!” Notice that Samuel didn't just say “Speak, Lord.”

He said **“Speak Lord, your servant is listening!”** He wasn’t just acknowledging that God was talking to him. He was pledging to listen, to take to heart, and to do what God would say. Remember what Jesus said? **“Blessed are those who hear the Word of God, and keep it.”**

What a difference from the people of Israel in those days. For four hundred years, Israel had been ruled by the Judges. But “ruled” is a loose term in this case. Much more accurate is the description given in the book of Judges: **“In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit.” (Judges 17:6)** And they didn’t see fit to do what God said. Even the High Priest’s sons, who should have been setting an example for people to follow, acted as if there were no God. No matter how much of God’s Word they may have heard, it didn’t matter to them.

How different Samuel was. **“Speak Lord, your servant is listening!”** he said. And listen he did. He knew what God said was true. He knew God meant it. The next morning Samuel was afraid to tell Eli what God had said. He must have looked pale. But Eli insisted. Samuel told him God had said his wicked sons were going to be cut down in battle. Eli himself would fall over backward in his chair and break his neck when he heard the news of his sons’ deaths.

Samuel continued to humbly listen to the Lord’s Word and do what God said for the rest of his life. He became one of the greatest prophets of Israel. He anointed Saul king, and when Saul turned away from the Lord Samuel anointed David to succeed him. All the while, he fearlessly told everyone, Saul included, what God wanted them to hear, whether good or bad. He didn’t fear for himself. He just wanted to be faithful to the Lord and his Word. **“Blessed are those who hear the Word of God, and keep it.”** And Samuel was blessed—as will everyone be who says from the heart: **“Speak Lord, your servant is listening!”**

So many people prefer to say, “You listen Lord, your servant is speaking!” “I want to do things my way. My thoughts are higher than your thoughts, God, and my ways than your ways.” There are so many people who respond to God’s Word by saying, “well *I think...*” These people are sure God talks to them, but they can’t seem to find his Bible. They don’t have time to look for it, they say. There are billions of people on this planet who love their own ideas, but don’t give a hoot about God’s Word. Sadly, we can fall into that trap ourselves, can’t we? We know God’s Word is important—in theory. But not important enough for us to read it on our own, or share it with our families in devotions, or come to Bible Class. Shame on us! It shouldn’t surprise us when our own children or grandchildren turn out like Hophni and Phineas.

We need to change and become like little children, again. We need to change and become like Samuel. When God talks to us, when he calls out our name in his Word, we want to jump up with the eagerness of Samuel and say from the bottom of our hearts, **“Speak Lord, your servant is listening!”** We want to take it to heart when he tells us the truth about ourselves and our sin in his holy Law. We want to believe the Gospel with all our hearts, that we are forgiven for Jesus’ sake. And we want to do what God says, even if it hurts. We want to commit our lives to serving God, just as the boy Samuel did. Let’s follow the example of this child Samuel in the simplicity +of his faith, the humility he had before the word of the Lord, and his consistent zeal for the Lord’s work. Amen.