



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

www.mzluth.org

January 15, 2012

2nd Sunday after Epiphany

Sermon Text: [1 Samuel 3:1-10](#)

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: [1 Samuel 3:1-10](#)

Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 67](#)

Second Lesson: [2 Thessalonians 2:13-17](#)

Gospel Lesson: [John 1:43-51](#)

Are You Listening?

Do you remember all those commercials for Verizon Network with the guy walking around with the glasses on saying "Can you hear me now?" You saw those over and over, didn't you? And over and over. It was kind of effective because it demonstrated how their network went everywhere and things like that, but how many wives do you think called their husbands with their Verizon Network and were able to be heard but the husband didn't listen to what the wife said? Do you think that ever happened? Hearing and listening are not the exact same thing, right?

You children here, do you ever hear your parents but not really listen to what they tell you to do? Did that ever happen? Once, maybe twice? You spouses, do you ever hear your spouse but not really listen to what they say? Once, maybe twice, an hour?

It's easy to understand and grasp this truth, isn't it? Hearing and listening are two different things. Listening involves knowing, I suppose, who is speaking. It took Samuel awhile to figure out exactly who he was listening to, right? Listening involves, I suppose you would have to say, putting into practice what you hear. That's kind of what we see today. We see it and we learn it from an unlikely source.

Any of you children that are here 11-13 years old? That's about the range that we find Samuel in. So this is someone your age that God is calling to in the middle of the night three different times. You are going to the guy that has raised you since you were about 2-3 years old, because that's when your mom brought you to live at the temple, and that's where Samuel has grown up serving in the temple of the Lord, the tabernacle that was there, and now God is coming to talk to you. Can you imagine what that would be like?

I don't think it's that surprising that Samuel goes to Eli, because that is who has always been calling him in the middle of the night. It sounds like Eli's sight was getting bad and he had to be getting up there in age, right? So if he needs help or he needs someone to get him something, I have to believe he'd say "Samuel, come here." That makes sense, so this is probably a somewhat normal occurrence.

So Samuel goes and he presents himself three times to Eli. God is calling out to Samuel here because this is really going to be a pivotal point in the history of the children of Israel. It moves us from the time of the Judges. Samuel is kind of the pivot from the time of the Judges to the time that they had Kings in Israel.

Moses was called a prophet of the Lord when he led God's people. The prophet would come that would be like Moses, the Messiah, but from what we know, there weren't a whole lot of prophets at this time. It says visions from the Lord were rare. Now God chooses this young kid and calls to him and he is going to make him this great prophet, this great leader of Israel, the last Judge of Israel, the prophet of Israel that moves them into Saul and then David. That's all going to be a part of Samuel's ministry. So God has big plans for Samuel, but at this time, Samuel is a little kid sleeping in the tabernacle of the Lord, opening doors, lighting candles, doing whatever grunt work he had to do.

Then this voice comes. To Eli's credit, Eli finally figures out that it has to be God that is calling him. He gives him some wonderful advice. He tells him to go back and lie down and if he hears the voice again to say, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening." That's wonderful advice Eli gave. In a sense, it's amazing advice that Eli gives because it's not advice that Eli himself had really followed all that well during his time as the High Priest.

The time of the Judges is a bleak, bleak period in the history of the children of Israel. What was going on among the children of Israel during the Judges makes 0-16 look like a good season. It says that everyone did what they saw was right in their own eyes. Can you imagine what that would be like? We are sinners. We are going to do what's right in our own eyes. There are going to be problems. God would chastize his people and send the Philistines or someone else to come and reek havoc among them and then the people would say, "Lord, lord, help us!" He'd send a Judge, a champion, who would defend and lead Israel, and then the cycle would just keep repeating itself.

Eli as the High Priest at this time had not done what God wanted him to do. His sons were absolutely wretched. His sons, as they offered sacrifices in their jobs as priests, would come and take what looked like the best part of the sacrifice for themselves and gave to God the stuff they didn't really care for. They would come and take it because it was all about them. Not only that, as the people came to offer various sacrifices, they had their eyes out for the women that caught their attention, and they forced themselves upon these women. The things they were doing were reprehensible as representatives of God. Sexual scandals among God's representatives is not only something of the 20th and 21st Centuries. It was happening back then.

God told Eli he had to fix it, and Eli just mildly rebuked them. They were his kids, and I supposed he didn't want to do what God had told him to do. God had said, as you heard at the end of what I read to you, that his wrath was going to come on Eli because he didn't listen and didn't listen and didn't listen. "I've come to you. I've come to you. You haven't listened. And now no sacrifice is going to pay for the sins of your family. My wrath is going to come on you."

That's a horrible story, isn't it? Imagine yourself an 11-13 year old and you have to go tell the guy that raised you, "God's not happy with you. God's wrath is coming on you." That's what God called Samuel to do here, right? Can you imagine doing that?

Honestly, I can't see myself doing that when I was 11, 12 or 13. But God has plans that are not our plans. God has plans on how he is going to do his work and we would say, "Wait a minute, Lord. I have a better idea. Send someone else." Right?

So when Samuel goes and says, "Speak, Lord, your servant is listening," he heard the message. Can you imagine how his intestines clenched up? Yet we are told he did what he was called to do. He listened. He didn't just hear what God said, he listened and he did it.

God's Word has the power to work in us things we never think we could do. But the key is, the absolute key is that we have to be focused on God and not on ourselves. That's hard for us, isn't it? Do you ever find yourself in situations in life where your attitude is not quite "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening," it's more, "Listen, Lord, for your servant is speaking"? "Lord, this area of my life isn't going the way I want it. Why aren't you fixing it? Get on that, God." "Lord, I have this problem with these friends over here. Lord, fix that." Do you ever find yourself kind of turning things backwards? "God, you have to be listening to me. I have this problem or that problem. Fix this or fix that." Sometimes God has already given us our answers. And they're there in his Word. The question is, are we going to listen to those answers he gives us in his Word? Maybe even more basic. Are we hearing them?

Do we hear what his Word says, or is the only thing we hear is what we have seen in our experience over and over and over? Do we dig into the Word to see what it says, or do we just go by what we've always seen done so this is what we should do and anything different must obviously be wrong? That's pure spiritual laziness on our part, isn't it? We are all there at one time or another because we are all sinners. We are all there at one time or another saying "Listen, Lord, your servant is speaking" because we are sinners. You and I sin because we don't say "Speak, Lord, your servant is listening." It's as simple as that.

Do you ever get so frustrated with someone because you say something and they don't hear it? You tell them again and they don't listen to it. You tell them again and they don't listen to it. Have you ever gotten to that point with someone where you just threw up your hands saying, "I'm not talking to you anymore. I'm not even going to waste my time talking with you about this anymore because you don't listen to me. You want my advice and you don't listen to it." Do you ever get there?

Think about God and how often he gets there with us, and yet how patient he is, and how loving he is, and how he continues to reach out to you and to me through Word and through Sacrament to say, "Here is how I have taken away your sins of not listening. Here is how I have taken away your sins of not doing what I have called you to do." Think of how often he reaches out to us through the Word which has the power to lead us to follow when he says, "Follow me," which has the power to lead us to believe when it says, "Believe in me." It has the power to say, "You are forgiven" to us, and then the Spirit assures us we are forgiven through the life and death of Christ. These sins where we have not listened to our God have been taken completely away.

Unlike you and unlike me, God forgives our sins and remembers them no more. He doesn't come back and beat us up with "I already told you this. Weren't you listening?" He just simply tells us again, "I love you. I've taken away your sins in Christ."

You and I rejoice to hear and listen to that message, right? Hearing and listening to that message leads us to want to hear and listen to our God more and more and to do the things he has called us to do. When he gets it through our thick heads and we finally listen to the message of his Gospel and we finally see it and rejoice in it, then we say, "Lord, I want to serve you. I want to show my love for you." Listening to our God then involves serving our God and speaking the message he has given to us. Sometimes, just like little Samuel, it's a hard message. It's a hard message to go to people at times that are very close to us, but they need to hear what God has said to them.

God has called us to share our faith with other people, not to hire a lawyer to share it for us, but to share it ourselves. That's what he has called us to do...to tell people the nuts and bolts of who Jesus is and what he has done for them. He wants us to do that, not by going out and tackling someone that doesn't know Christ, washing their face with snow until they admit that they believe. That's not what he is talking about doing. He is talking about living our faith so that we earn the right to be heard and then to be ready to give an answer for the hope that we have.

So, are you listening? Are you ready? If not, get ready.