

**First Presbyterian Church
Southampton, New York
“God is Calling... are We Listening?”**

**Psalm 139:1 – 6, 13 – 18
1 Samuel 3:1 – 10**

January 18, 2015

Well, I've had my new hearing aids for a couple of months now, and I can tell you that they really do make a difference! I mean, before I got the hearing aids, the most commonly repeated expressions in the Boyer home were:

“*What’s that?*” And, “*I beg your pardon?*” And, “*Come again?*” And the ever-popular, “*Huh?*”

And, of course, by now many of you have heard about how, one evening, Sylvia asked me if it was too early for her to have a glass of wine. To which I responded with, “*I already gave the cat water!*” **That** was when we knew that good old Pastor Rick definitely needed hearing aids!

Anyway, as I said, the hearing aids have helped a lot. Not that I hear perfectly now... they're not **that** good; but I do hear a lot better, and that's good enough! And if I forget to do something that Sylvia has asked me to do, I can still say, “Sorry, Honey, I didn't hear you!” I just can't get **away** with that now... because she knows darn well that I heard her!

Our Scripture lesson today from First Samuel brings us the story of another person who was having an issue with his hearing. Not that he wasn't hearing well enough, and therefore needed some kind of ancient hearing aid; no, this young man's hearing was crystal clear. His problem was that he didn't know **who** he was hearing; he wondered if his hearing was maybe playing **tricks** on him; and, no matter who it was he was hearing, he had no idea what any of it **meant**.

Of course, I'm talking about the young prophet-in-training, Samuel... who, at the time of the events described in our text, was about the same age as our Confirmands here; or maybe just a little bit older. According to the opening chapters of First Samuel, shortly after his birth, Samuel had been dedicated to the service of the Lord, by his parents, Elkanah and Hannah... so he was now living in Shiloh, the place where the people of Israel went to worship God in those days; along with Eli, the priest, and his two good-for-nothing sons, Hophni and Phinehas.

Samuel was something of an apprentice under Eli... and he assisted Eli with all the various duties which had to be done, whenever people came to offer sacrifices at the Shiloh tabernacle... the tabernacle being a temporary sanctuary or place of worship: a large tent-like structure which served as the hub of Israelite religious life, in the years before the Temple was built in Jerusalem. Anyway, Samuel was Eli's helper... and, according to our text, one night when everyone was fast asleep, Samuel was awakened by a voice coming to him in the tabernacle, which was where he slept each night. And the voice said, “*Samuel! Samuel!*”

And Samuel, hearing the sound of someone calling his name, answered, “*Here I am;*” and then, assuming that it was old Eli who'd called him, he ran to where Eli was sleeping, and said, “*Here I am; you called me. What up?*” To which Eli responded, “*I did not call; go back and lie down.*”

Now, the text doesn't tell us what was going through Samuel's mind, as he trudged back to his makeshift bed in the tabernacle. But, if he was like you and me, he was probably thinking something like, "*Wow... that was weird! That must have been some vivid dream! I could've sworn that someone was calling me!*"

So, Samuel goes back to bed, and back to sleep, and all is well. Until, again, the mysterious voice wakes him up with a call of "*Samuel!*" And, again, Samuel gets up, rubs the sleep out of his eyes, and shuffles over to Eli's room, again to ask, "*Here I am! You called me. What do you want?*" And, again, Eli answers, "*My son, I did not call; go back and lie down.*" And off Samuel goes, back to bed... leaving Eli to scratch his head and wonder, "*Maybe the kid got some bad gefilte fish... and he's having nightmares!*"

So, it's turning into one of those not-very-restful nights for both Samuel and Eli... but back to bed they go, hopefully to sleep right through 'til the crowing of the rooster wakes them up in the morning. But it was not to be. For a third time, Samuel is roused from sleep by that same insistent voice, once again calling "*Samuel!*" And, for a third time, Samuel padded over to Eli, to once again announce, "*Here I am; you called me.*"

And it's at this point that the light finally goes on for Eli... and he realizes that Samuel hasn't been dreaming, or hallucinating, or suffering from indigestion. No, the young man had been hearing not Eli's voice... but the voice of God Himself. And so *this* time Eli said to Samuel, "*Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.'*"

Which Samuel did; and when the voice came to him for the fourth time that night, calling "*Samuel! Samuel!*" Samuel stayed put... and responded with, "*Speak, for your servant is listening.*" And the Lord then proceeded to fill Samuel in on His future plans for the people of Israel, which included the downfall of the worthless Hophni and Phinehas; the conquest of Israel by the Philistines; and, worst of all, the capture of the cherished Ark of the Covenant by those same hated Philistines.

But as for Samuel himself, he would become the chief spiritual leader of Israel... the leading prophet, or mouthpiece of God. And, as the text goes on to tell us at the end of chapter three, "*Samuel's word came to all Israel.*" And Samuel would go on to have quite a career as a prophet... including the anointing of the great King David, under whose leadership Israel would enjoy its heyday as a kingdom.

I think that most of us can relate pretty well to the story of young Samuel, tossing and turning on his little bed in the tabernacle... as he misidentified and misunderstood the voice of God, calling to him in the night. Not that we're being called to be kings and queens and liberators of our people; and not that God's asking us to be national spokespeople for the cause of His kingdom.

Just that, I think we know what it's like to hear God's voice... and think that we're hearing something else. I think we know what it's like for God to be leading us one way... as we go running off the other way, because that's the way we've always run before. I think that, like Samuel, our first inclination is to think that that's not God's voice speaking to us, but the voice of someone more familiar... someone who's going to keep us safely ensconced in the comfort of the status-quo, and not lead us off into who knows what kind of future which might be a little challenging and difficult.

I think that, most of the time, God's got to be pretty persistent with us before we wake up, rub the sleep out of our eyes, figure out what's going on... and realize that God Himself is rousing us from our slumbers and saying: "*Hey, I'm talking to you! Pay attention and listen up... because I've got some pretty special plans for you!*"

Of course, the good news is that, God *is* persistent with us... and sometimes *very* persistent! And, just as He did with Samuel, He'll keep tapping us on the shoulder, and waking us from our sleep, and whispering in our ear until, someday, hopefully, we'll finally get the message that God is up to something in our life; and we need to pay attention to whatever it is that that something may be.

All of which means that the challenge for you and me, as Christian disciples, is to make sure that when God comes calling... we're not just standing around saying, "*Huh? What? No comprende!*" But that we've got our spiritual hearing aids turned on; so that we can hear God's voice, and recognize it, and do our best to follow it leads us. Not that we're necessarily going to hear an actual, audible voice like Samuel did; that kind of thing may well never happen to us. But that we'll "hear" with our hearts; and with our souls; and with our minds. And understand that God is stirring us, and preparing us, and giving us our assignment.

All of which sounds great; but which is, as we know, a whole lot easier said than done. Because, as we know, there are a lot of obstacles out there to our attentively listening to God... and hearing what He has to say to us.

Like, for example, that fact that we're sometimes just plain too busy to hear the voice of God speaking to our hearts. We're so full of work, and responsibilities, and kids' projects, and everything else that we can barely hear ourselves think... let alone hear the voice of God. Or the fact that we're so distracted by all the superficial, technological, pseudo-cultural cockadoodie that assaults our senses every day of our life... that half the time we don't know what we're hearing or what means or if any of it really makes any difference in the first place.

Or the fact that, for one reason or another, we've convinced ourselves that the days of God speaking to people is a thing of the past, an ancient relic of a superstitious bygone era... that doesn't have anything to do with life in our world today. So that if God ever does happen to get through to our hearts and minds, we assume that it must be something else. Or the fact that we're frightened of the prospect of God speaking to us; the fact that, frankly, we don't want God to invade our comfort zone, or rock our boat, or upset our carefully loaded applegart. We want to just go with the flow, keep things safe and predictable, prop up the mirage that we really are in control.

You see, all of those obstacles can get in the way of our really hearing, and really listening to, what our Heavenly Father is trying to say to us. And one of our most important responsibilities as Christian disciples is to do our best, to *try*, to overcome just a little of the distraction... and, like young Samuel, *hear* the voice of God speaking to us right here.

Our quest is to rise above some of the exhaustion... and realize that God is not just with us, but also interested in us, and what we're doing with our lives. To set aside some of the doubts and questions... and give God some access to our souls, so that He can maybe touch us in some new way that will strengthen our relationship with Him. To renounce some of the fear that makes us want to keep God at arm's length... and trust that, no matter how frightening it may be to follow Him, when we do, He always leads us to our good.

You see, in all these ways, we make like Samuel... and we take an important step in the direction of finally responding to the Lord as he did: "*Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening!*" And when we do *that*... we take our relationship with God, and our discipleship in His service, to a whole new level. And that's what the Christian life is really all about!

As we make our way into the week ahead, let's remember that God really is calling to us... in one way or another. And may we have courage to accept the life-changing challenge to listen... *really* listen, to whatever it is that our Lord might be saying. If we do, our faith will grow! And our life with the Lord will never be the same again! That's His promise... and that's our hope!

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, amen!