

1 Samuel 3:1-10 O.T. 236 (NRSV)

¹Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD under Eli. The word of the LORD was rare in those days; visions were not widespread.

²At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; ³the 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. ⁴Then the LORD called, “Samuel! Samuel!” and he said, “Here I am!” ⁵and ran to Eli, and said, “Here I am, for you called me.” But he said, “I did not call; lie down again.” So he went and lay down. ⁶The LORD called again, “Samuel!” Samuel got up and went to Eli, and said, “Here I am, for you called me.” But he said, “I did not call, my son; lie down again.” ⁷Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him. ⁸The LORD called Samuel again, a third time. And he got up and went to Eli, and said, “Here I am, for you called me.” Then Eli perceived that the LORD was calling the boy. ⁹Therefore Eli said to Samuel, “Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, ‘Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.’” So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

¹⁰Now the LORD came and stood there, calling as before, “Samuel! Samuel!” And Samuel said, “Speak, for your servant is listening.”

1 Samuel 3:1-10 O.T. Page 236
“Are You There? Pick Up?”

Opening Prayer: Please bow with me in prayer. Everlasting Father, we come away from busy lives to snuggle by your side and hear your sweet whispering in our ears. May your Spirit calm our inner beings so that we may hear and understand your Holy Word today. In Jesus’ Name we pray, **Amen.**

Introduction: Silence is golden. When it gets too noisy what do you do? Well you try to get away from the noise. But what do you do when there’s no way to escape. **You stick your fingers** in your ears. You try to create a quiet space between your ears inside your head. Let’s all give it a try. Let’s all stick our fingers in our ears for 10 seconds and see how quiet it gets. As you do this I want you to pay very close attention to exactly what you hear. So here we go, let’s all stick our fingers in your our ears for 10 seconds. (**Count Down...**) Thank you. Now what did you hear? Did any of you hear the golden sound of silence? Well, truthfully when you stick your fingers in your ears, all that happens is you change your ears’ focus. Rather than hearing what’s going on around you, **you’re hearing what’s happening inside you.** The first sound you notice when you stick your fingers in your ears is a muffled roar kind of like a steady-wind blowing over an open microphone. Now I’m not positive, but I think that sound comes from blood flowing under pressure through your head. Ok, in the middle of the muffled roar, what else do you hear? **Well most people can hear** the faint sound of their heart beating and they can hear themselves breathing. But there’s something else you can hear loud and clear. It’s not a physical sound, but you can hear it plain as day. **You can hear yourself think.** That inner voice that’s constantly chatting inside your head comes in loud and clear. That ability to hear your inner voice without outside distraction **is why we say** silence is golden.

PAUSE

Move I.

We live in a noisy age. There are many sounds competing to flood our ears. **There are** the sounds of traffic, **the sounds** of radio and TV, **and even the sounds** of those crazy cell phone ringtones. At times the noise is nearly deafening. In fact, I think it's the constant onslaught of noise that's the dominate characteristic of the modern technological age. We all live on audio overload. It's hard to get any peace and quiet. It's hard to ever be alone with our thoughts so that we can just sit and think.

The voice is an amazing thing, I think a thought in my head and my brain instructs my diaphragm to start forcing air up my throat which vibrates past my vocal cords creating pressure waves that are shaped by my mouth and tongue. As those sound waves emit from my mouth, they travel through the room **striking your eardrums** which turn those pressure waves into electrical signals that are sent to your brain and are interpreted as words. A lot of information is transmitted on those pressure waves. Not only can you tell what words I'm saying, you can tell that it's me who's saying them, and you can even tell what mood I'm in while I'm saying them. **I think you can** see that the gift of speaking and hearing is truly a marvelous gift.

The problem today is that there are just so many voices vying to be heard. There are the voices of thousands of commercials, the voices of all of those talk show hosts, the voices of the politicians and the pundits, and even the voices of those silver tongued TV preachers. **Which voices** do you listen to and which ones do you tune out? **Which voices** should you cup your hand behind your ear so don't miss a single word, **and which voices** should you stick your fingers in your ears and ignore. Hundreds of times each day we all have to make that judgment. Which voices are we going to listen to, and which voices are we going to ignore?

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In 1983 there was a brokerage firm that decided to use the fact that we live in a very noisy age to promote their investment services. **That brokerage firm** was E. F. Hutton. Do any of you remember E. F. Hutton's advertising slogan? "*When E. F. Hutton talks, people listen.*" The TV Commercial went like this. There are two people eating at a busy downtown restaurant and when one says to the other "*Well my broker is E. F. Hutton, and E. F. Hutton says...*" Immediately the entire restaurant grows quiet as everyone cups their ears to hear what the person is about to say that their broker, E. F. Hutton, said. That was a highly effective commercial, after all, most of us who are old enough continue to remember the message of that more than 35-year-old commercial today. But few people know that paying attention to E. F. Hutton back then didn't prove to be all that good of idea. **By the late 1980s** the brokerage firm of E. F. Hutton had disintegrated because of rampant corporate misconduct.¹ Eventually the government convicted E. F. Hutton of running an elaborate "**check-kiting**" scheme which defrauded thousands of its clients of their money. **So, it's really hard** to know which voices to listen to in this noisy age. **Yes, we really do live in a noisy age.**

End I.

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/E._F._Hutton_&_Co.

Move II.

And many don't hear God among all of the chatter. There're just so many other voices speaking today, that people don't hear when God speaks. It's not that God isn't saying anything; it's just that they're too distracted by all of other voices to hear what God's saying. And even when they do catch a word or two from God among all of the background chatter, some don't recognize it as being from God. They aren't accustomed to listening to God speak, so they don't recognize God's voice.

That was Samuel's problem in our Bible lesson today. God was speaking to Samuel, but Samuel didn't recognize God's voice. When God spoke to Samuel, who did Samuel think it was? Well Samuel thought it was the old priest Eli. Samuel would be lying in his bed at night; he'd hear a voice calling his name so he assumed it was Eli. **But when Samuel ran to Eli** to see what he wanted, the old man would say, ***“Go back to bed, I didn't call you.”*** Samuel knew someone was calling him, but he had no idea who it was. **In 1 Samuel 3:7 (NRSV)** we read, ***“Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him.”*** So, clearly Samuel is at a disadvantage, Samuel can hear a voice calling him in the night, but he has had no experience to tell him who it is who's calling him. Samuel can't recognize God's voice.

Do you know God's Word when you hear it? If God spoke to you, **would you recognize His voice?** Could you tell if it was God, or someone pretending to speak for God? Could you distinguish between the real thing and the imposters? Are you able to distinguish God's voice from all of the background chatter?

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On cable TV there's a channel that plays nothing but reruns of old TV game shows. One of those old-time games they show is "*What's My Line.*" On that show a **panel of celebrities** tries to pick the real person from among **a group of three** which includes two imposters. The host tells the celebrities the real person's profession, and then the celebrities get to ask members of the group some questions. After asking their questions, the celebrities have to guess which one of the three is the real person. Sometimes the celebrities gets it right, but a lot of times they all end up stumped.

Now, imagine how much easier it would be to play "*What's My Line?*" if you knew what the real person's voice sounded like before the game began. **Even when they'd hide** the contestants behind a screen, it wouldn't matter what questions anyone ask, as soon as the real person opened their mouth and spoke, you'd instantly recognize them. **That's the advantage** we have as Christians today over Samuel. **In John's gospel** Jesus tells of how his sheep know his voice. **In John 10:27 (NRSV)** Jesus says, "**My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me.**" So when a Christian doesn't hear God, rather they being because they can't recognize God voice, **it has to be because** they're allowing the other voices to drown God's voice out. They aren't tuning their ears to hear God. People are constantly bombarded by a lot of competing voices. **And many don't hear God's voice among all of the chatter.**

End II.

Move III.

But people still long to hear God's voice. People really want to hear God; they just aren't practiced in recognizing his voice, especially from among all of the background chatter. **Remember, true atheists** are actually fairly rare. **According to** a recent study by the *Center for the Study of Global Christianity at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary*, atheists—people who believe there is no God—only constitute **1.8%** of the world's population. So, most everyone believes in God and I think it's fair to conclude that they'd like to hear what God has to say.

While I was in seminary, I had to write a paper about the theology of **preaching**. Some of the questions I wrestled with in that paper were, (1) **“What is the Word of God?”** (2) **Where is the Word of God found?”** and (3) **How do you know it's God's Word and not just the preacher's imagination?”** Without getting hung up on the theological fine points the answers to those first two questions are **that Jesus Christ is God's Word, and that** the Word of God is found in the **Bible and in Biblical preaching**. But how do you know what you're hearing is God and not some imposter. **God's Holy Spirit** makes God's word known. Before I preach, sometimes I pray a prayer like this: **“May the Holy Spirit cause the Word to be spoken and understood in our fellowship today.”** God's Spirit mediates God's Word. God's Spirit allows us to recognize God's voice. That's how you know when it's God talking **or just the preacher babbling**.

That ability to recognize God's voice is what John Wesley, the father of Methodism, called **prevenient grace**. **When we** were like Samuel and didn't yet know the LORD, God gave us the sense to recognize God's voice and the ability to respond to God's voice. That's a grace not just reserved for a select few, but given to everyone. **Even the atheist** has received prevenient grace, so atheism isn't instinctive, but is born of human choice. God gives you the sense that God's there, but you're free to ignore, or even outright deny, that sense.

After being called a by God three times, Eli finally caught on and realized that it was God who was calling Samuel. **In 1 Samuel 3:8b (KJV)** we read, **“Then Eli realized that the LORD was calling the boy. So Eli told Samuel, ‘Go and lie down, and if he calls you say, ‘Speak LORD, for your servant is listening.’”** The old priest recognized it was God’s voice and instructed Samuel in how to respond to God’s voice. Samuel needed Eli to recognize and respond to the Word of the LORD. **In the same way** we need God’s Holy Spirit to recognize and respond to God’s Word today. **Without the Holy Spirit**, God’s voice would remain lost in the background noise. **Without the Holy Spirit** we would be as the psalmist describes in **Psalm 135:16-17 (NRSV)** where he writes **“They have mouths, but they do not speak; they have eyes, but they do not see; they have ears, but they do not hear, and there is no breath in their mouths.”** Without the Holy Spirit we would be deaf mutes. But all thanks be to God, **God has poured out** his Spirit upon us in these last days. **We are awash** in a sea of competing voices. **But people do still long to hear God’s voice.**

End III.

Move IV.

So, when God speaks, we need to answer, “Speak LORD, for your servant is listening.” The most important lesson from the story of Samuel and Eli is how to respond when you hear God call your name. You say, **“Speak LORD, for your servant is listening.”** There are three things that this response teaches us. Let’s break the response down into its parts.

First there’s the imperative command, **“Speak.”** When God calls your name the first thing to do is to invite God to continue talking. You see, God is actually very polite, when God calls your name; God won’t continue talking until you invite him to continue to talk. Remember, God had called Samuel three times, but each time God didn’t say anything more because Samuel hadn’t invited God to speak. So the first thing to remember if you want to hear God is **“Ask God to speak.”**

Now, let’s look at the second part of the response that Eli taught Samuel. When God addresses you, acknowledge your place. When the LORD God Almighty calls your name that’s not the time to be a wise guy or a smart aleck. Don’t say **“what’s up,”** or **“Hey, mighty dude.”** When addressing God, be humble. Remember that you are but dust. And when it comes to God, **your place is that of a servant.** Now don’t think that being a servant is a bad thing. In the Bible, servants are never menial. Even Jesus saw himself as God’s servant. **In Philippians 2:5-7 (NRSV) Paul writes “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness.”** Acknowledging that you’re God’s servant is to act like Jesus. **So the second thing** to remember if you want to hear God is **“be humble.”**

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That brings us to the third and final part of the response Eli taught to Samuel. When God calls you and you have invited God to speak, and have acknowledged your place, then you need to listen. Samuel told God, “**I am listening.**” Samuel was actively engaged in the act of listening. Nothing else was distracting Samuel, God had Samuel’s undivided attention. So the third thing to remember if you want to hear God is “**to listen.**” The action of hearing always requires listening.

I think this final point is our biggest problem today. Most people don’t hear God because they don’t listen. When most people pray, **they do all** of the talking. They never pause long enough for God to get a word in edge wise. And when they do pause to listen, like when the Bible is being read in church, or when the Word is being preached, **their mind actually wanders** elsewhere. **They’re thinking** about the going skiing this this afternoon, **or about** what they’re going to have for lunch, **or they’re still sulking** about having to get out bed so early on a Sunday. Perhaps we need to do like we did at the beginning of the sermon today. **We all need to start sticking our fingers in our ears** and start blocking out the distractions of this world. When we pray and read scriptures, not only should we speak, we need to stop and listen to God. **We need to be still**, and know that the Lord is God (Psalm 46:10). **So, when God speaks**, we do need to answer, “***Speak LORD, for your servant is listening.***”

End IV.

Conclusion: When you stick your fingers in your ears your focus changes from what's happening on the outside to what's happening on the inside. You block the world out so you can hear yourself think. **We do live in noisy age.** We all live on audio overload. **And many don't hear God among all of the chatter.** God speaks, but most people's ears aren't tuned in to hear what God's saying. **But people still long to hear God's voice.** And by God's prevenient grace, we've been given the Holy Spirit who helps us recognized God's voice and enables us to respond. **So, when God speaks, answer, "Speak LORD, for your servant is listening."** To hear God we need to do three things. We need to (1) ask God to speak, (2) we need to be humble, and (3) we need to listen. **So the next time** you hear God calling your name, say, **"Speak LORD, for your servant is listening."**

Closing Prayer: Let's pray. Oh Lord God, just as you spoke to your servant Samuel, you still speak to us today. Help us to block out the distractions of this world, so we may hear your voice among all of the background noise. Speak to us so that we may learn how to speak of you. **Amen!**

10:30 Closing Hymn: "Lord Speak to Me that I May Speak" Red Hymnal No. 463

All Five Verses

Sending Forth: The Lord's Word is living and active today. God's speaking to you; God's calling your name. Cup your ear and listen. Go forth, not only as hearers of God's Word but as doers of God's Word too (James 1:22). **And all of God's people said...Amen!**