

down. That is slow down enough to hear God speak. Then Eli told Samuel to listen. Most of the time we want to speak, but God needs us to listen. Then, however, there is one more step and that was to speak back to God. Speak, for you servant is listening says Samuel.

The servant not only slows down and listens, but also responds.

If God had been interested only in companionship, the work of creation would have come to a screeching halt after dogs came into the world. Dogs will come when you call, lie at your feet, go on long walks with you, and above all, show you unconditional, unmerited devotion. But, God was not satisfied with mere companionship. God wanted a relationship. And so God created human beings. Relationships require an intentional exchange of ideas and emotions between both parties. If God had simply wanted Samuel to become an oracle for the divine message; there is no reason for the divine hesitation that occurred after each of God's first three calls to Samuel. Eli's council to Samuel is to "speak up" when the voice comes again to him.

Rev. Roberta Corson, of Campbell, California, tells about a family with a small girl of perhaps 2, who visited her church. During the service, Rev. Corson invited all the children present to come forward to hear a story. When Corson finished the story, she instructed the children to return to sit with their parents. The visiting child "remained in the front, standing alone in the chancel area facing the stained glass window, oblivious to other people and activity. She simply stood in silence; having caught a glimpse of something the rest of us had failed to see. Was it the light coming through the stained glass? Was it the high-vaulted ceiling? Was it the holy mystery of God? After a long time, she quietly turned and went back to be with her parents." Carson writes, "I never came to know that child, but I also have never forgotten her. She is you and I, our children, and the children of our neighborhood and world. She is every child, open to the holy. She has not yet been conditioned to miss it."

How wonderful when God calls your name. Can we affirm today, God still calls our names? He stands and calls to His children and if we will be open to holy, if we will place ourselves in the presence of God in our wonder of it all... listen, God will speak.

Will Willimon writes in *Character in Calling* we must be called and recall the joy of being grasped by something larger than ourselves. That is what we want this day. We want to know God's call for we know that call to something bigger than ourselves will ultimately give us life abundant and eternal. Listen... God is calling you by name.



When God Calls Your Name

1 Samuel 3:1-10

TRINITY PULPIT

Is there anything as nice as hearing your name? When someone knows our name it makes us feel noticed, important, and significant. When someone important calls us by name we have even a greater feeling of this importance. Maybe it is a supervisor or your CEO or the President of your company. When you work somewhere for a long time, it is nice to know that someone knows your name. You can remember in high school or college discovering that the boy or girl you had a crush on actually knew your name. That was normally a good sign.

I don't think it is a secret that one of my favorite places to eat is Pharaoh's grill in North Hills. My goodness those fries are awesome. Well if you go to Pharaoh's, then you know about Debbie. Debbie is the cashier about whom an article appeared in the newspaper over a year ago. Debbie is one of those people that everyone wants to work for them. The hundreds of customers that come into Pharaoh's are surprised when as you step up to the cash register to order Debbie says what will you have today...and then calls you by name. She not only calls you by name, but ask do you want the regular. For me she would say, "Hi Jeff, how is you today? How are Hal, Andy and Spencer? Do you want the King Tut?" Of course I want the King Tut, which is by the way the Cheeseburger. Debbie calls you by name and in that moment you feel important. You don't feel like a number or just a consumer. Every business wants to create that feeling.

The pastor I followed here at Trinity Dr. Bill Furr was incredible when it came to names. He could remember everyone's name and their kid's names and everything about them. I am pretty good at it, but I have my moments. I try hard at it because I watched Bill Furr model it for me over and over again. He taught me that people like to hear their name and when they hear their name they know they are important.

So, we know that we like to hear our names. When we hear our name we know that we are not overlooked and forgotten. How much more, then when God calls our name? The Bible is filled with instances where God calls people and God calls them by name. Interestingly there are 8 times in the Bible when God calls a person by name and does it by calling their name twice.

There is Abraham. When God calls Abraham's name twice he is stopping him at the sacrifice of Isaac. God calls Jacob's name twice as he tells him that his son Joseph is not dead, and that he is going to Egypt to see him. God calls Moses' name twice from the burning bush when God is about to tell Moses what God has as a plan for him. God calls Samuel twice, as we have already heard from our text. Jesus speaks Martha's name twice when she is so concerned about the matters of the house, but he wants her to know that Mary has chosen the wiser course by listening at his feet. Jesus speaks Simon Peter's name twice as Jesus prepares Simon for the testing he is going to go through. Jesus calls God's name twice from the cross in His agony. Calling on God's presence and strength. Jesus calls Saul's, who becomes the Apostle Paul, name twice when Jesus appears in a vision and asks Saul why are you persecuting me?

Think on these moments from God's word. One is a call to stop and action. One is a call to be a leader of God's people. One is a call to give understanding of what is going to happen. One is a call to give hope. One is a call to give direction in priorities. One is a call to let one know that there are moments of testing. One is a call to remind us of suffering. One is a call to turn your life around.

Amazing, is it not, that in these double calls of the Bible we find many of the things we want God to speak to us about in our own lives. We desperately want God to speak to us and tell us, "Is this right or wrong?" We want God to let us know that yes, this is a test and I am going to bring you through it. We long for God to



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speak a word of hope to us to let us know that the future is going to resolve some of the pain of the past. We want God to speak to us and say here is the order of priorities of your life. We want God to speak and tell us here is what is going to happen in the big picture and this is your part in the whole. We want God to stop us if we are not doing what he wants us to do. We want God to shout it at us and say, "Why are you doing this, God? ... and do this, God."

How we long to hear God shout our name not once, but twice.

Yet, most of us spend our lives wondering does God still speak? If God does speak how do we hear God speak? How do I know it is God speaking and not just my own thoughts and wishes? Does God still call us by name? Are we that important to God? Does God value us enough to call us by name or are we just overlooked?

The story of Samuel offers us not only the hope that God speaks, but also some ways we can prepare ourselves to hear from God and how to react to God's call in our lives.

Samuel was the boy of promise. His mother Hannah and Father Elkanah had come to the Temple over and over again for sacrifice. Each time they would come, Hannah would pray for a child because her womb had been barren. Then one day Eli, the priest, found her praying. Hannah was said to be praying in her heart, but only moving her lips with no sound. Eli accuses her of being drunk. He tells her to get rid of your wine. Hannah replies, "Not so my lord, I am a woman who is deeply troubled. I have not had wine nor beer. Do not think I am a wicked woman I am praying here in great anguish." Eli is moved at her devotion and said may the Lord grant you what you are praying for. Hannah and her husband lay together and Hannah became pregnant and she named the boy Samuel for I asked the Lord for him.

Then Hannah did something amazing. After all of this praying and wanting a child, because she knew Samuel was a blessing from God, she presented him back to God. She took Samuel back to the Temple and Samuel would stay in the Temple and serve alongside the priest, Eli. That is where we find the beginning of the story we read today.

Samuel is serving in the Temple with Eli when one night he hears his name. Thinking it is Eli calling him he goes to Eli and says, "Yes, you called me?" Eli responds, "I did not call you, go lie down." This occurred three times. The third time, the wise Eli told Samuel that the next time he heard his name say "speak Lord for your servant

is listening." God called his name again and notice in the text this time he spoke his name twice. Samuel answered speak for your servant is listening. In that moment, God told Samuel His plan for Samuel's life.

There are some lessons we can glean from this story about God's call upon our lives and in our lives.

First, we need to affirm that God still speaks and at the same time we need to affirm that hearing God's voice and knowing God's will is sometimes a mystery. I want us to affirm that God still speaks. The Bible is pretty clear about this, and it is Jesus who tells us that this is the case. In John 14, Jesus is promising the disciples that not only will he come back for them, but in the time of waiting... the Holy Spirit will come and will remind them of everything they have been taught. In other words, God does not stop speaking when Jesus ascends into heaven. God continues to speak in the time of the church.

God speaks to us even today. If we think God has become silent and no longer speaks to God's people, then we surely have arrived at a terrible place. The question is obvious; if God speaks, how does God speak? Most of us would respond to this whole question of God speaking by saying "if God would just speak to me in an audible voice, or a burning bush, or send me an angel, or at the least put up a billboard. Maybe he could give me a book to read...sarcasm intended.

I am reminded of a minister who was asked by his friend regarding his call to ministry "are you telling me that God spoke to you in an audible voice?" To which the minister replied "O no, it was much louder than that!"

We must begin by affirming that God still speaks. It is only that affirmation that puts us ready to hear. We must believe that God still calls us by name.

As a part of this affirmation, can we be honest with each other and say that many times the voice of God is mysterious? It seems to be the case in Samuel's case. We are told two things that are the context of Samuel's call. First, Samuel had never heard the Lord's voice before. Thus, he was not expecting it and had no context to receive it. He just kept going back to Eli over and over again. It had not dawned on Samuel that this was God's speaking. Only when he opened him up to this possibility did he begin to hear what God had for him. In addition, we are told that in those days a word from the Lord was rare and there were not many visions. In other words, this was not a daily occurrence. This was mysterious.

I think most of us would like for God's direction and voice to be more science than art. That is the way our western

mind works. We read the Bible and we look for patterns and proof and determine okay, this is what God did here so that is what God is going to do in my life. However, when we read the Bible we discover God speaks in various ways to those who God chooses. Sometimes there is a messenger, sometime a leader, sometimes a donkey, sometimes a still small voice, sometimes a theophany or loud voice from heaven, sometimes a blinding light. Sometimes in a dream. Over and over again God speaks in different ways.

I am always leery of our Christian friends who seem to have nice little formulas to following God's ways. I am always leery to that person who always has the answer and lacks questions when it comes to following Jesus. Samuel has questions. Moses had questions. Saul had questions. Abraham has questions. Jacob has questions. Jesus cry from the cross is followed by a question. Why have you forsaken me?

The Bible is pretty clear that God speaks in different ways and many times there are questions. So, I want us to be honest about this because this will keep us from living frustrated. I find there are a lot of people who live life frustrated because they hear others speak of hearing God's voice and they struggle with this and so they think they are unworthy, or unloved, or unwanted by God. That is not the case. We can determine from the Biblical texts that God speaks to us not in formulas, but within our relationship with God and our circumstances, which are many times personal to us.

So, God's call is many times mysterious and hard to discern, but that does not mean we cannot hear it, nor discern it. I look at Samuel's life and I find three things he did to be in the place where he could hear God's call.

First, he put himself in the presence of God. We are told that day after day Samuel ministered in the Temple before the Ark of the Covenant. The Ark of the Covenant was the place where God resided. So we might say, daily Samuel found himself in God's presence. One side note and that is Samuel did not end up here on his own choosing. His mother took him there. Parents, it is our task to take our children and lead our children to places and experiences where they can be exposed to the idea that God is present and God is speaking. Now we know that the Ark did not contain God, but this is still important. We have to daily place ourselves in the place

where we are aware of the presence of God.

Jesus is our model for this, as Jesus is our model for everything. We always remember that first we are followers of Jesus. What did Jesus do to put Himself in God's presence? That might sound odd because Jesus is God and yet, it was His habit we are told to go off to solitary places and pray. We are also told that Jesus went to the Synagogue and worshipped with God's people on the Sabbath. The gospel again describes this as "His habit."

ALTHOUGH GOD'S CALL IS SOMETIMES MYSTERIOUS, THE ONE THING WE CAN DO IS TO PLACE OURSELVES DAILY IN A PLACE WHERE WE BECOME AWARE OF GOD'S PRESENCE. WE CAN ALSO PLACE OURSELVES IN WORSHIP ON A REGULAR BASIS AS A WAY OF LISTENING FOR GOD'S CALL.

So our Lord Jesus, on a daily basis, entered into prayer as a way to listen to God's voice and Jesus weekly placed Himself in the presence of God and God's people as a discipline to listen for God's voice and guidance. Before every major decision and action we find Jesus praying.

Although God's call is sometimes mysterious, the one thing we can do is to place ourselves daily in a place where we become aware of God's presence. We can also

place ourselves in worship on a regular basis as a way of listening for God's call.

A second action Samuel takes is to seek the guidance of another. Samuel goes to Eli. It is Eli who understands what is happening. Eli gives Samuel instruction. The gift of others is so important when are trying to discern the call of God in our lives. We find in others those who have walked with God and those who have heard God's call and experienced what it means to follow God and to know God's activity in their lives.

We all need mentors. We all need a brother or sister in Christ who have walked with Christ. We all need those who will encourage us and help us discern. The church is the place where we find this gift. We find those who can say I have been there, I have had my times of questions, I have had my doubts, I have had my struggles, but God has been gracious and faithful to me. God still is calling my name. We need to discernment of others.

Lastly, we need to listen but to listen as a servant. Samuel's response is speak, for your servant is listening. It is one thing to listen and it is another thing to listen with a servant's heart. A servant's heart listens, but is also ready to respond.

One writer has put it this way. Eli told Samuel to go lie