

I.N.I.

Twenty-fifth Sunday in Pentecost
November 6, 2016
I Samuel 3:1-14

In Christ Jesus, who speaks to us through His Word, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

How well do you really hear? Like right now, are you really listening, or will you be listening 10-15 minutes from now when I am in the middle of this sermon? Do we sometimes hear only what we want to hear? Or do we hear with our mind shut and our mouths open?

Sometimes our ears hear the words but our mind does not digest the message. That is why communication is so important—good listening habits need to be practiced and employed. Especially when it comes to listening to God's Word.

Take the examples in our Scripture readings this morning. In our first reading we heard of two young men, sons of the High Priest Eli. Being sons of the High Priest they couldn't help but hear the Word of God; the books of Moses. No doubt from infancy on they were taught the stories of Adam and Eve, of God's grace given to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. At their mother's knee they no doubt heard of God's calling Abraham and his descendants to be His children and how He delivered them from the slavery in Egypt with the 10 plagues and the parting of the Red Sea. Assuredly they knew of their ancestor Aaron, the first High Priest. They no doubt heard of the 40 years of wandering and the crossing of the Jordan River, of the victories by Joshua and the people settling the Promised Land. By the time they were born there had been many years of judges who faithfully led the people after they had fallen into idolatry and unfaithfulness. They no doubt heard of the immorality of the people and the judgment as well as the grace of God.

Being children reared in the very temple of God they heard all of God's commandments, the statutes and decrees; the threats of the Law and the Promises of Jehovah's love in the prophecies and ceremonies and observances. Yet having heard all of this they really did not HEAR!

We do not know if Hophni and Phineas were at one time believing children and then fell away; or if they never feared, loved and trusted in the Lord Jehovah. Most likely the former is true—somewhere along the line they stopped hearing God's Word, maybe not physically stopped hearing with their ears; but spiritually stopped hearing with hearts of faith.

Instead of reverently conducting the worship services as priests of God; they took what they could for themselves; stealing from the members' sacrifices. And even more abominable, they had sexual relations with the women who served in the temple. Imagine sons of the High Priest, priests themselves, religious leaders of the people, servants of the Lord living and acting in this immoral, ungodly way!

No longer did they really hear the Lord in His Law which condemned fornication, lust and stealing. No longer did they really hear the Lord in His threat of damnation to all who reject Him. No longer did they really hear the Lord in His Words of grace and forgiveness to all who repent of their sins and look to the coming Messiah. The only voice they really listened to was the voice of their own sinful flesh.

What a contrast Eli's natural born sons were to his adopted son, Samuel. You remember the story. Hannah had no children and prayed to the Lord to give her a son. She said she would dedicate him to the Lord. The Lord opened her womb and she gave birth to a son and after she had weaned him, she brought him to Eli and from that time on Samuel served the Lord by serving Eli as his assistant in the temple.

No doubt Samuel also heard the very same stories about the history of the children of Israel; the same miraculous events that Hophni and Phineas heard. Undoubtedly, Hannah spent many an evening with Samuel on her lap singing Jewish Psalms to Samuel and repeating the same special, precious stories over and over again. And no doubt since he had been with Eli he had heard the Laws and the Commands of Jehovah as well as the many Promises and prophecies found in the ceremonies. But in Samuel's case he really heard--heard not only with his ears; but with his heart. The message of the Word struck home

In our sermon text Samuel was a youth, probably around 12 years of age. He had been serving Eli since he was about 4 or 5 years old. He knew the LORD Jehovah in faith. The Holy Spirit had created a love for Jehovah God in his heart; but as yet he had not experienced the Lord's direct revelation to him. In fact we are told **THERE WAS NO WIDESPREAD REVELATION**. But that all changed that evening.

Apostate Israel deserved to have God's Word and revelation removed from them forever. But in His grace God was once more about to raise up a faithful, Spirit-filled messenger, who would receive His

Word with reverent faith and proclaim it clearly again so that the people would be saved from the gross immorality and spiritual depravity that engulfed them. What amazing grace!

Being the dutiful servant that he was when he heard his name being called, Samuel could only assume that the aged Eli needed something. But after three times of getting up and running to meet Eli's needs, finally Eli realized that this must be the LORD Himself calling the young boy---this young boy for whom God had great plans.

So Eli directs Samuel: **"GO, LIE DOWN; AND IT SHALL BE, IF HE CALLS YOU, THAT YOU MUST SAY, 'SPEAK, LORD, FOR YOUR SERVANT HEARS.'** Imagine Samuel's excitement as he went back to his bed. Had he really heard a voice, and was this voice really God calling him? And if it was God speaking to him what did He want? He didn't have long to think about it for shortly after he laid down the Lord again called out to Samuel and Samuel answered as Eli directed; **"SPEAK, FOR YOUR SERVANT HEARS."**

No doubt it was with fear and trembling that Samuel said these words. God was directly talking to him. How would he respond? How do we respond?

Do we respond with humility, reverence, love, obedience? Do we respond to the Word of God being spoken to us with a humble heart recognizing these words as God's Word? Do we have an attitude of trusting obedience that is ready to accept that which God speaks as being the truth, believe it and obey it? Or do we rather not listen? How often have we not turned to God's Word when the Lord was ready to speak to us—on a Sunday morning, in our Bible Class or Sunday School; in our daily devotions? How often have we said, "Wait, Lord, I am too busy to listen to You right now. Maybe later"?

Sometimes we listen with our ears but not with our heart and mind? We may be right now thinking about a hundred different things going on in our lives, rather than concentrating on what God is saying to us in His Word. For the sin of neglecting God's Word; of not appreciating His Word as we should; for not hearing it as consistently as we should; for hearing it but not applying it to our lives as we should; we come before our Savior-God with repentant hearts and seek forgiveness through Jesus.

When Martin Luther was a student at the University in Erfurt, he found a copy of this Bible lesson. He read it with great interest and longed to be like Samuel and hear God's voice. Well as Luther studied the Bible he realized that on the pages of the Bible, God was speaking to him as He once spoke to Samuel and Luther listened, listened carefully.

In Samuel's day as in Luther's, **THE WORD OF THE LORD WAS RARE.** People had little interest in what God's Word had to say. Instead they followed church decrees and man's commandments or their own ideas and opinions. No greater judgment can fall on a nation than when it suffers the loss of God's Word. When people do not appreciate and make use of the Gospel, God often takes it from them. May we be aware of this, make use of God's Word consistently with real hearing ears so that such a famine of the Word does not come upon us.

Samuel's response, **"SPEAK, FOR YOUR SERVANT HEARS,"** would become the essence of his calling as a prophet. These words are an accurate description of all that Samuel said and did as he served the Lord in Israel for the rest of his life. Isn't it interesting that when the Lord looks for someone to speak for Him, the very first qualification is that the person be willing to first listen when God speaks; be a listener with real hearing ears. The secret to Samuel's success as a prophet was not that he excelled in speaking but that he excelled in listening to and hearing God's Word!

We see that in how Samuel responded to these first words of the Lord. The message that God gave to Samuel would cause the ears of everyone who hears it to tingle. Because of Eli's son's wickedness and Eli's refusal to take disciplinary action against them, both his sons and he would die the same day.

Samuel could have gotten up the next day and fled from the Lord's house. He could have lied to Eli and told him a different message that all was fine. He could have said he forgot what God had said, but he had said to God; **"SPEAK, FOR YOUR SERVANT HEARS."** Samuel was God's servant; His slave to hear God's Word and then to tell what he had heard. So faithfully Samuel told Eli all that was revealed to him.

In the last verses of this chapter we are told: **SO SAMUEL GREW, AND THE LORD WAS WITH HIM AND LET NONE OF HIS WORDS FALL TO THE GROUND. AND ALL ISRAEL FROM DAN TO BEERSHEBA KNEW THAT SAMUEL HAD BEEN ESTABLISHED AS A PROPHET OF THE LORD.** Samuel had passed the first real test of a prophet. He heard God's Word and spoke what he heard faithfully and unashamedly. Samuel's position as prophet was strengthened by further revelations from the Lord that were all fulfilled. With Samuel, God established the prophetic

office to function alongside the office of priest and king. Samuel was the first of a long line of faithful prophets---servants who heard God speak to them and then revealed it faithfully to His people. Peter spoke of this on Pentecost when he said: **YES, AND ALL THE PROPHETS, FROM SAMUEL AND THOSE WHO FOLLOW, AS MANY AS HAVE SPOKEN, HAVE ALSO FORETOLD THESE DAYS.**

SPEAK, LORD FOR YOUR SERVANT HEARS. Daily the Lord speaks to us in His Word leading us to repent of our sins, to look to Jesus alone for forgiveness, life and salvation, calling us to work in His vineyard, in His kingdom wherever that may be—in our homes, at work, at school, in our recreation time. We have a message that will cause all who hear it to have tingling ears too. A message that all have sinned and fallen short of God's glory. That all people by nature are lost and condemned sinners. There is none that does good, no not one in God's eyes. Eternal death in hell is our future.

But we also have this message to speak. God sent His Son—the Prophet, Priest and King into this world to take the place of all sinful people and live a perfect life of obedient love. This was done to satisfy His justice and demand of perfection. Then this perfect God/Man was placed under the Father's judgment of condemnation for our sins and damned for us. His death paid for our punishment; His damnation paid for our damnation and His resurrection back to life assures us of our resurrection to eternal life in heaven.

We all have heard this message many times with our ears, may we hear it with real hearings ears, with our hearts of faith, so that we too like Samuel will faithfully hear and then fearlessly proclaim it to all whom we meet.

Speak, O Lord Thy servant heareth, to Thy Word I now give heed;
Lord, Thy Words are bread life-giving; on Thy Words my soul doth feed.
Precious Jesus, I beseech Thee, may Thy Words take root in me;
May this gift from heav'n enrich me so that I bear fruit for Thee!
Amen.