

"When God Speaks"  
1 Samuel 3:1-10

January 15,2011

Second Sunday After the Epiphany

Many years ago, there was a funny television commercial for a stock brokerage firm called E.F. Hutton. The ads would show two people talking in the midst of a crowd of noisy people - at a party or a bar or a restaurant. The two of them would be discussing stocks. One of them would say, "My broker is E.F. Hutton and E.F. Hutton says...." When he said that, the room becomes immediately quiet. The man looks around and all the other people had their ears cupped, trying to listen. The point of the commercial is that the words which E.F. Hutton has to say are quite valuable and not only deserve our complete and undivided attention, but are worthy to be shared with others.

Suppose God was to speak in the same way. Would we react in the same way? Would we all stop, become quiet, and pay attention to His calling? Would we want to eagerly pass along what we have heard from Him to others? Our initial reaction would naturally be, "Oh, yes!" But I wonder about that. The season of Epiphany carries with it a theme of evangelism. God has revealed His Son to us and He calls us to reveal His Son to others. Have we listened though? Have we spoken?

Our lesson for today is a story about God calling another person. His name is Samuel. He is a very famous person in the Old Testament and his story is very interesting. Samuel's mother was named Hannah. Hannah had no children and wanted children very much. So she prayed to God for a son. Hannah promised God, "If you give me a son, then I will give him back to you to serve You." God answered her prayer and gave her a son - Samuel. When Samuel was still a little boy, his mother brought him to the temple and left him there. Samuel was to serve the Lord in the temple and help the high priest, Eli.

One night, Samuel was sleeping in the temple. The Lord called, "Samuel!" Samuel got up and went to Eli. Samuel thought it was Eli who called him. Eli was old and sick. Maybe Eli needed help, Samuel thought. Although Samuel did a good thing in attempting to help Eli, he was ultimately

wrong. Why? God had spoken clearly to Samuel and Samuel heard the words, but, instead of listening to the Lord's calling by responding to *Him*, Samuel went and did what he *thought* was right.

Are we not the same? We meet together here in God's holy temple - His Church. God calls to us - His people - to serve Him by bringing the message of His love through Jesus Christ to the world. God has spoken to us very clearly in the Bible in revealing the Gospel of Jesus Christ – the forgiveness of sins and the hope of everlasting life – as well as how He wants us to go and share that message: "go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." We have heard the words time and time again. But are you listening? Most importantly, are you responding?

I think we often act like Samuel. We hear the words, but we don't respond correctly. We get up and do other things, as Samuel did when he went to Eli. They may seem to be right, just as Samuel's actions seemed right to him. They may be very religious things around church which seem important and are important. We get so busy with organizations and committees and meetings and other activities within the church that we don't have time to pay attention to the Lord's words about making disciples.

Or, perhaps, even worse than Samuel, we have clearly heard our Lord's calling, but we are trying to ignore it. We are afraid or nervous to speak about Jesus to our friends. We don't want to bother them or we fear their reaction. Maybe we forget to speak about Jesus to our friends because we hear so many other voices in the world calling for our attention. Maybe, if we are honest, we have to admit that we don't want to speak about Jesus. We are satisfied to enjoy forgiveness and have eternal life from God for ourselves, but we are not anxious to speak about that to others. So, we stay on our little mats in the temple, like Samuel, only we cover our ears and hope the voice goes away. When we are not bringing the Gospel of Jesus Christ to our church family, our community, and the

world, then we are hearing God, but not listening to Him; we are understanding God, but not obeying Him.

Notice what happens in our text. Samuel heard the call of the Lord, but didn't respond correctly. However, God didn't forget Samuel or abandon him. God patiently continued to call Samuel. God called a second time and a third time. Samuel responded wrongly a second time and wrongly a third time by going to Eli. Each time, Eli told him to lie down again. Finally, Eli realized that God was calling Samuel. Eli told Samuel what to say. God called Samuel a fourth time, "Samuel!" Now, Samuel understood the Lord was calling him. Samuel said, "Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening." The Lord spoke to Samuel and now Samuel not only heard, but he also listened and obeyed. If you continue to reading the story of Samuel's life in the Bible, then you know how he did that. The Lord spoke to Samuel often. And Samuel spoke these words to all the people in Israel. All this happened because God did not abandon Samuel and because Samuel finally responded rightly, "Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening."

God has not forgotten us, either, despite our sinfulness and our refusal to listen to Him. He sent His Son, Jesus, to die on the cross and rise again to forgive us our sins and make us His people. When we do wrong and do not listen to His speaking, He patiently bears with us and forgives us again and again. Maybe you *have* been afraid to speak about Jesus. Yet God forgives you. Maybe you *have* forgotten to speak about Jesus and been busy with other things. Yet God forgives you. Even if you honestly admit that you didn't want to speak about Jesus, God will still forgive you for that, too. God forgives us for all the times we have ignored His calling.

As God called Samuel a 2nd, 3rd, and 4th time, so also God calls us again and again. God calls us through His Holy Word - the Bible. God sends pastors here to remind you of your calling, to encourage you in your calling to speak of Jesus' love, and to train you how to do that. As God revealed His will to Samuel, so also God will show us how to do His will here.

Through the power of the Holy Spirit living in you through baptism, become like Samuel and eagerly say, "Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening." Not only hear His Word, but listen and

respond to His call to you. Philip did that in our Gospel reading for today. Jesus called Philip to follow him. The first thing Philip did was to go and tell his friend, Nathaniel. He met with rejection at first. "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Nathanael asked. Instead of being intimidated and giving up, Philip simply said, "Come and see." Each of you can do that too - speaking of Jesus' love and inviting friends to "come and see" it for themselves. Some of you have already done that and are doing that on a regular basis.

We can also work together as a congregation to do hear, listen, and respond. Your Board of Elders is planning a workshop in February to help you learn how to bring the good news of Jesus to our community. Please support that with your attendance. We can and have reached the community with the good news through our Sunday School, Midweek School, and Vacation Bible School. The evangelism booth at the state fair has been an opportunity for our church to establish a presence in the greater community.

Evangelism can be a scary word. Doing evangelism may make us nervous or afraid. But we can do it for God does not give only commands, but God also gives promises. When Jesus said, "go and make disciples of all nations," He also gave a promise. Jesus said, "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." So, when we say, "Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening," and we respond by obeying His call, He goes with us to help us, encourage us, strengthen us, to bless us and give us success.

As we begin a new calendar year, let us also begin a new and renewed effort to reach out into our community with the Good News of God's love in Christ Jesus. All of our inactivity in the past, as well as any mistakes and failures, has been covered with the blood of Jesus Christ. They have been forgiven. When Jesus says, "Go and make disciples from all people," let each of us eagerly respond, "Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening." Then, let's do it - with His help, His blessing, His guidance, and His strength. Amen.