

Is That God's Voice?
Scripture: 1 Samuel 3:1-10

We sometimes wonder if anything notable or positive can come from the familiar. Newspapers are full of bad news and a “good news” story is difficult to find. We hear so much bad news that we start to anticipate more bad news. And when we do that we question listening to the news at all.

In reading today's Old Testament lesson it appears as if that atmosphere was as negative as today's. The voice of God was silent and Godly visions were events from the past. At least it appeared so. Perhaps God was not silent it was just that people were not listening. Were the faithful deaf to God's life-giving word? Eli could no longer see; were all of God's people blind in the arms of Morpheus?

You might remember that Samuel and Eli were alive before Israel had their first king, even before the first temple was built. At that time, God's people, the twelve tribes, were simply an informal alliance with the patriarch of each tribe and with the judges ruled the priestly, legal, and military aspects of life together.

What held these tribes together was their pledge, their covenant with God. Without a temple, the Ark of the Covenant, the symbol of God's presence, was located in a shrine in Shiloh. Eli was the priest at Shiloh, a position he had inherited. He was a good priest but his sons were immoral, irreverent, and unsuitable priests.

This was the environment in which Samuel grew. He was Eli's servant, performing the household chores Eli could no longer do. The evening when Samuel heard the Voice of God, he may have been sleeping in the tent where the ark was kept.

There he was, a young adolescent, curled up on his goat-hair blanket, just about asleep and someone called his name. Note how Samuel didn't respond as a surely teen might have: “*Get out! Leave me alone!*” Instead, he went to Eli and said, “*Here I am.*” Knowing how I respond when awakened from sleep I can understand why it took Eli three times to get it! God was at work here.

Can you hazard a guess what was on Eli's mind? Has the green giant of jealousy raised its head? Or is Eli filled with enthusiasm over the fact that God's voice may have been heard again? Or is he anxious because God sometimes tends to appear only when bad things happen?

No matter what was rattling around in Eli's brain pan, what he said to Samuel was audacious: "*Go back to bed and listen to what God says.*" And that's what he does! Samuel becomes a reliable prophet of God, never fearful of saying what God asks him to say.

How do we apply this story to us today? I think initially we need to ask ourselves, "*Does the word of God get through to us? If I listen do I also obey?*" If we give up on our faith it may appear that God has gone silent. We may even suggest that God has deserted us.

If we have not been open, sensitive to God's presence, thinking of God only as a big shot who bails us out of our troubles, or if we hear God's word and then do our own thing anyway, we may find that we are related to Eli, blind to sin around us.

But, the news is not all bad! There is also some wonderful news too.

God is persistent! Because God saw you before you were born (and loved you), and because God has a vision of who we may grow to be, God never gives up on you.

God's action does not depend upon us. Samuel didn't know God but God showed up anyhow. Samuel grew to know God because God came to him not the other way around. This does not imply that it's wrong to seek God just that God does not depend on that.

God is not in the discrimination business. Samuel was young, Eli was old. Yet, God used both of them.

So, the question remains: Are we ready for God to use us? There are no 'plateau' Christians. In a relationship with God there is always movement, growth, and change. In God's lexicon you cannot find "*status quo.*"

As we look around our communities we do see good happening but there is also need here. God's word needs to be declared. Many people live in darkness and despair, longing for God.

They live in our communities, next door to us, in our schools, and the place we work. You see them in the stores you frequent. Children did not sleep last night because they were hungry or dad and mom fought again. Some senior citizen had to choose between something to eat or a medicine to take.

Who will hear God's word and answer it? It may be that there is a Samantha or a Samuel sitting right here, eager, and ready to answer the call lacking simply the inspiration of Eli.

It may be that you identify more with Eli than Samuel, more inclined toward heaven than earth. Yet, God desires to use you too! Not later but now. The needy, the marginalized, the hopeless live in the now. We are present now and so is God.

God's love in Christ Jesus shines in this world of darkness. Even in OUR community. What then will we do about it? Who will God send? Alleluia. Amen.