

1 Samuel 3:1-10

One little word makes a big difference. In our text it's the little word *yet*. "*Samuel did not yet know the Lord.*" In the previous chapter we're told that the sons of Eli the priest, Hophni and Phinehas, were worthless men, and that they did not know the Lord. That little word *yet* is missing here. These worthless sons of Eli did not know the Lord, nor would they ever know Him. The young man Samuel did not know the Lord, but in time he would. "*Not yet,*" we're told, but soon.

Samuel knew Eli. And so when God called him in the middle of the night, naturally he assumed that Eli was calling. Eli knew the Lord. At this time he was the only one who did. But God was not calling him; He was calling Samuel. And it was Eli who needed to see this.

God can call, and call, and call, but if the one He is calling does not know Him, how will an answer be given? We get the impression from the narrative before us that had God called "Samuel!" a hundred times that night, a hundred times he would have gone to Eli saying, "*Here I am, for you called me.*" The third time, however, Eli perceived that it was the Lord calling the young man. "*Go, lie down,*" he told Samuel, "*and if He calls you, you shall say, 'Speak Lord, for Your servant hears.'*"

God is not going to call you and me like He called Samuel. Samuel was called to be a prophet. We're told that John the Baptist was the last of the prophets. Anyone, therefore, who thinks he is called to be a prophet today is a false prophet. "*Long ago,*" we read in the Book of Hebrews, "*in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son.*"

It is Jesus who stands calling to us. Not through dreams and visions; through the Holy Scriptures. He calls us to be His Christian people; to leave our life of sin and walk in the way of holiness. And that's a call we do not, necessarily, always like to hear. The answer we are to give is the one Eli gave to Samuel, "*Speak Lord, for Your servant hears.*"

How often do you say that? Every Sunday morning? Every single day? Jesus calls us to hear His words; to read and study them. I think that rather than saying, "*Speak Lord, for Your servant hears,*" we often say, "Not now Lord, I'm busy." "I can't hear You now, Lord, try again tomorrow or next week."

God did not call to Samuel when it was convenient. It was at night; the young man was tired; it was dark. How tempting it would have been for Samuel to say, "Later..." and roll over in bed. But he didn't. He is an example for us.

Don't you think that God calls to us especially when it is inconvenient because He is testing us? Are we really His children or not? Are we His children only when it's convenient for us? It was easy for Adam and Eve to be God's children before the Tempter came. The test, for them, was to determine whose call they would hear and obey: God's call to live in the way of holiness, or the devil's call to eat the fruit of the tree.

God is not the only one calling to us. The devil calls us every single day. But he disguises his call. He calls to us through sexual lust, through illicit drugs, through anger and revenge toward the one who wronged us, through the desire for riches, and through a host of other disguises. What does it say when we reply to such a call, “Speak to me, for I am listening!” but tell God, “Not now Lord, I’m in the middle of something important!”

But we are not baptized to be the devil’s children. We are God’s children. He washed us and brought us into His family. Do we believe this? How well do we know Him. “*The Word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to (Samuel),*” we read. But it has been revealed to us. It wasn’t Samuel’s fault that he did not yet know the Lord. But it is our fault if we do not know Him, for His Word has been revealed to us. If we do not want to hear it and study it, and thus truly know the Lord, that’s not on God; it’s on us. Let us be warned not to be like Hophni and Phinehas who perished, but like Samuel who obediently replied to God, “*Speak, for Your servant hears.*”

God knew him. He called to him by name: “*Samuel!*” The young man did not yet know the Lord, but in time he would because the Lord knew him. This is what it means to be baptized. God calls you by name in these waters. He names you as His dear child. It was in the middle of your night, when the devil and his darkness covered you, that Jesus stood in the water of the font and named you as His dear child.

It wasn’t you who caused this, just as it wasn’t Samuel. He did not yet know the Lord, nor did you. He did not summon God. He was laying in his place at night, and God is the one who came and called to him. So with you. You were in your place, and not in the place God wanted you to remain. For your place was to be with Christ. Your place was to be here in His house, to grow in His Word, to kneel here at His altar and receive His body and blood.

This is why God constantly calls to you. Not to deal with you according to His strict Law; to wrap you within His mercy. His call is like that of a concerned pet owner calling to her dog in the middle of a stormy night. She calls not to frighten him; not to scold him. Her call is one of love. She desires to bring her dog safely out of the storm and into her loving arms.

This is God’s call to you. It’s a storm out there. And maybe it’s a storm in here, within your mind and life. Jesus is not calling to you to reprimand you. Yes, He wants for you to walk in the way of holiness, which you and I have avoided. But He leads you into that way by loving you, by forgiving you. Look at His hands. They bear the marks of the nails of the cross. The same love that moved Him to die for you moves Him to keep you safe with Him; moves Him to call to you each and every day.

Don’t just leave here today. Leave answering His call: “*Speak Lord, for Your servant hears!*” Not only will your life be blessed; the lives of others will be blessed through you. Amen.