

Hey... This Is Meant for You!
Sermon for the 6th Sunday after Easter – *Exaudi*
Sermon Text: 1 Samuel 3:1-10



Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the Lord in the presence of Eli. And the word of the Lord was rare in those days; there was no frequent vision. ² At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his own place. ³ The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the Lord, where the ark of God was. ⁴ Then the Lord called Samuel, and he said, "Here I am!" ⁵ and ran to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call; lie down again." So he went and lay down. ⁶ And the Lord called again, "Samuel!" and Samuel arose and went to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call, my son; lie down again." ⁷ Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, and the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him. ⁸ And the Lord called Samuel again the third time. And he arose and went to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." Then Eli perceived that the Lord was calling the boy. ⁹ Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down, and if He calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, Lord, for Your servant hears.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place. ¹⁰ And the Lord came and stood, calling as at other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" and Samuel said, "Speak, for Your servant hears."

God is true and steadfast. But what if you can't see or hear anything from Him? The feeling when God's voice falls silent and you feel left alone awakens great sadness and confusion in us. Because of this, some raise their voices accusingly and ask why God does nothing against injustice. Others simply lose faith that God exists at all. One such time of God's silence was in the time of Samuel. It meant that God's Word fell silent. There was no Bible, no Psalms, no Bach motets. It was a time of spiritual desert wanderings, when even the prophets fell silent. Such stretches of spiritual desert can give us a new hunger and thirst for God's Word. On the other hand, we can also get used to God's silence. It may be that because of this, we no longer expect anything from God, either in everyday life or in worship. In this way, we become spiritually weak and immobile. We only do the necessary prayers and church services but have long since drawn our logical conclusion: Man can very well live by bread alone... It is likely that Eli the priest was one who had become accustomed to the religious rituals. He was not completely jaded but for him, God and His voice was no longer anything exciting or new. In his training young Samuel to be a man of God, Eli had not even taught him the possibility that God can actually speak! Samuel did have quite a bit of knowledge about how to conduct worship, what to do with the Ark of the Covenant, and where the 10 Commandments are kept. He also knew a bit about what to do during the service of sacrifice at Shiloh. But Samuel didn't know God Himself. In the end, Eli could not have taught Samuel that either because you don't get to know God only through a well thought out religious education. God reveals Himself to whom He wants, when He wants to, not when we have decided He should do so. But when God speaks, it can happen that we are so spiritually numb that we don't notice it. This was the case with Eli and Samuel. God had to call out to young Samuel three times in a row before Eli finally understood that it was God's voice calling to Samuel.

And both of them were, so to speak, religious professionals. If even two religious professionals couldn't initiate something with God, how could others? This can be seen in the story of Samuel's calling. Whereas Samuel and Eli were no longer contemplating God's speeches, the others were already completely finished with God and had run away with the Temple treasury. All this didn't happen because God had completely hidden Himself. No, God was not absent but the people had so armored themselves against His Word that it no longer reached them. And in this spiritual desert, God's Voice broke into Samuel's world and called: "Samuel!" But Samuel did not hear. When the Bible talks about "hearing," it always has a spiritual meaning. The well-known Jewish prayer, "Shema Israel" (Hear, O Israel!), not only wants to get people's attention, but it also wants to reach people internally. The ear should not only perceive and process sounds, but the heart should also be affected. The heart is the decision-making center of people and from here all decisions and actions are produced – good or bad. When God's Word hits the heart, the whole person is changed. This means that the person repents and changes the direction of his

life, away from Satan and ungodliness and towards God. Jesus emphasizes the same thing when He says: “He who has ears to hear let him hear!” (Matt. 11:15) It may be that we hear God’s Voice but still don’t have the spiritual antennas for it.

Do we have ears that can hear? It’s worth looking at hearing. The modern person is surrounded by a barrage of sounds and offers. All these voices that talk at us not only want our attention but want to also influence us and demand decisions from us. Because of the many propositions pouring into our ears, we have forgotten how to listen. We have forgotten how to respond to the needs and wants of others. We may even no longer know our own needs and desires. And for a long time now, we also haven’t had an ear for listening to God.

What does it mean to listen to God? First, it means that we approach listening to Him with undivided attention and don’t confuse God’s Voice with so many other things. But it means more than that. It also means that we put aside our own thoughts that want to push forward and so that we listen to God. And it means even more. It means that we allow God to change our will. All of this is easier said than done, of course. Our thoughts, as we know, have a will of their own and go in this direction or that direction all on their own. It seems to be impossible to capture or control these thoughts. If a truck races down a mountain without brakes, no traffic signs will help because the brakes don’t work. It can’t stop at all even if it wanted to. Our thoughts are similar to this. They are like a speeding truck without brakes. Sometimes it can be a single thought that either plunges us into a pit of depression or tempts us to take wrong paths or to form a negative prejudice against someone. It can be difficult to stop such things, just as it may be difficult to stop a truck without brakes.

Perhaps it’s worth pausing for a moment to reflect on our listening in worship. How is it that God’s Word often seems boring to us in worship? We then say that we have heard it all before. Can it be that we know these texts only according to our own understanding and have built up a giant concrete wall of our own pre-understanding, so that God’s Word can no longer get through to us? We hear God’s Word but our thoughts put it into this category or that one. So God’s Word no longer brings us anything new... That’s why, under such circumstances, God’s Word may be boring or we may not understand what it is all about. What must happen for our hearts to be opened to God? Pleading won’t help stop the speeding truck any more than a traffic sign will. God Himself must intervene through His Holy Spirit. He must bring the speeding truck of our thoughts to a standstill. In our sermon text, God does that. He opens Samuel’s ear by addressing him directly: “Samuel!” Yes, Samuel, that means you. Perhaps that’s exactly what we need when we read the Bible and listen to sermons – being spoken to directly. The Bible is always directly talking to us. The Bible is not just a book of the ancient Greeks and Hebrews, but it speaks to us. Yes, He’s talking to you! Perhaps, we should replace Samuel’s name in the text with our own name... Yes, God is speaking to you. In this way, God opens our ear to the sermon and to listen to His Word. When Samuel listened to God for the first time, a change took place in his life because God didn’t just open Samuel’s ears, but also his heart. This meant that from then on, Samuel wasn’t just listening to God, but his actions were also in line with what he was hearing. This was especially impressive when he broke through all the rites and customs of his time and didn’t shy away from confronting the king with his sin.

God met Sameul through His Word by speaking to him personally: “Samuel.” God did all this much more concretely, directly, and personally by taking on flesh and living among us – for Jesus is God’s Word among us! With Jesus, we see how we should listen to God’s Word – He is in perfect harmony with God’s speaking. He listens to God and His actions correspond exactly to what He heard from God. Word and deed are in perfect harmony in Jesus. Because Jesus was so close to the mouth of God, He always had an open ear for His contemporaries. But more than anything else, we see that in Jesus, listening and doing belong together. He not only listens but is obedient to the point of death on the cross.

Unlike in Samuel’s time, we have God’s Word and we have a liturgy and we have Bach’s cantatas since God has spoken to us ultimately through Jesus Christ and through His cross. At this point, God calls us personally and addresses us: “Yes, I mean you... and no one else!” Amen.