

# Sermon Text for October 9, 2016

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*Matthew 17:1-8, I Samuel 3:1-10*

“Listen”

So my mom lives in Florida, on the east coast of Florida so I was following Matthew pretty closely. When we lived in Florida we had our share of hurricanes hit us and one year in a span of a month we were out of electricity for 16 days. So when the governor of Florida said: If you live in the evacuation areas and you do not leave you will die, I listened. I heard what he said. Beyond a shadow of a doubt his statement got people's attention.

You know, we are not wired to naturally listen. Before you become a Stephen minister you have to go through 80 hours of training to be able to do what they do, simply because it does not come naturally to any of us. There is a long standing joke of husbands having selective hearing when it comes to hearing their wives, but the fact of the matter is that we just have a tough time listening to other people, period. No matter who you are.

The same is true when we are called to listen to God. Both of our Scriptures today deal with protagonists who have to be taught, encouraged, both are actually shown how to listen to God, simply because it did not come naturally to them, just as it does not come naturally to us. All throughout Scripture we find imperatives, commands directed to us to listen to God and then to respond and act.

One of the most famous invective to the people of Israel is called the Shema and it is found in Deuteronomy 6:4 and it begins how? Hear, or listen, Oh Israel. It has been a command for us to follow ever since God chose his people and it remains a command for us today. Hopefully today we can learn how to listen better to the Word of the Lord, just as Peter and Samuel are taught.

Our first Scripture reading is called the transfiguration and it depicts Jesus taking his three favorite disciples, Peter, James, and John, to a mountain where he is transfigured. The glory of the Lord literally shines on him and the presence of God is tangible and even visible. These three disciples experience that event because they are willing to go along with Jesus as he invites them to the mountain with him. It is a life changing experience and one that as you are going through it you would think that you would be overcome with awe and remain speechless.

Well, not so for Peter. Peter is one of those people who feels as if he needs to be the one who fills the silence. He is the one in the crowd who feels like everyone wants to hear what he has to say. He was wired, and lived out that character trait of always wanting to be right and to

tell people so that they would consider him right. You know those people, you tend to avoid them.

So, no sooner do they climb the mountain that Moses and Elijah appear and Jesus' garments begin to glow with the glory of the Lord. No one is speaking, so that's an invitation for Peter to fill the void. Jesus, you are so lucky that we are here, I've got an idea. Let's build some shelters that way we can keep Moses and Elijah here and you can also have one. He went on to describe what would be next in his plans when all of a sudden, look at vs. 5, while he was still speaking God said to Peter: Peter, just shut up!

My kids are taught from a young age never to use those words, we don't use them at my home, no one does. But God uses it here and interrupts Peter in mid-sentence and tells Peter: Listen to him. We need God to tell us in our lives at times to be still and know that I am God in the words of King David in Psalm 46:10. We need to be interrupted in our lives as we cruise along thinking that our need for God is relegated to Sunday morning as opposed to a lifetime of dedication and devotion.

When God speaks, Peter and the others react. As soon as God speaks they fall down. When God tells them to listen, they listen, there was no choice. That has to be our response to the voice of God that we hear. We must respond by falling down in the presence of the Lord. Notice what Jesus says to them, now that he has their attention, now that they are listening? Do not be afraid. That is God's voice to us in the midst of our lives. What a message we will hear if we will only listen.

There are so many other voices around us that tell us to be afraid. Society screams be afraid of liability so we make decisions accordingly. Be afraid of terrorists so lock down your schools and close your borders. Be afraid of being poor and without the things you want so we make money any way possible. But Jesus says, get up, don't be afraid. Who are we listening to?

Samuel heard the voice of the Lord but had no idea who it was. Listen to these words from a commentary that I read this week. "There were few people who were deeply concerned either to listen for His voice or to express his will in society. As a result, worship was corrupted for private gain and the nation's life was disintegrating in factional dispute." Believe it or not this was written in 1953 addressing the current reality in the days of Israel, how when Samuel was a child no one listened to the words of the Lord for it was drowned out by the voices of society. The more things change, the more they stay the same.

These verses begin by saying that the Word of God was rare in those days. Another meaning of rare is precious. God's word was precious because it was so rare it came so

infrequently, to the point where when it did come it could be easily missed. The word of God was rare because people weren't listening. Worship was a joke because the sons of Eli used their position to influence people on how to vote and what to spend their money on just to line their pockets. People were in it for profit, that's all that mattered and the poor and the powerless, those loved by God, were being ignored and trampled.

Samuel, well, Samuel he was different. We pick up with him wanting to be as close to the Lord as he possibly could be. He was lying by the ark of the covenant. Remember in Raiders of the Lost Ark when they opened the Ark, what happened to them all? They all died. There was definitely a fear in those days for that responsibility. Remember Zachariah the father of John the Baptist who was on duty in the Holy of Holies. He had a rope tied around his foot in case the wrath of God would come to strike him dead. But Samuel was asleep next to the ark.

Samuel wasn't worried, he was fast asleep next to the ark which represented the physical presence of God. He was as close to God as anyone could be. Just like Peter, James, and John. They were in the presence of the Lord, and wanted to be, which is why the Lord could reveal himself to them, and now, today, to Samuel. Samuel was probably 12 and we read an interesting thing in vs.7. As soon as Peter heard God's voice, he and the others knew who it was and they were overcome with fear. Not Samuel, he heard God's voice three times and had no idea what was going on. In vs. 7 it tells us that he did not know God yet. He didn't know how to hear and respond to God's command. He had to learn.

But even though Samuel did not know God, God had already chosen him. Even though Samuel had not chosen God yet, or understood who God was, God had chosen him. So Samuel had to learn how to listen and respond to God. Eli teaches him that. Eli teaches him how to listen. Speak Lord, for your servant is listening. You see Samuel's ministry begins in these verses and they begin with him listening, not with him knowing the answers. When Jesus was in the temple also at age 12 he was listening to the rabbis of that day. At age 30 he began his ministry by going out to the desert to listen for 40 days.

It takes work to listen. What makes us think that it just comes naturally? We have to be taught how to listen to God and how to listen to each other. This is what both Peter and Samuel have in common here, they are both taught to listen.

We live in a time when we simply do not listen to each other. We have allegiances that are stronger than what unites us in Jesus Christ. We have political allegiances that when we hear that a person stands in a different place than we do, we won't listen, even if they love Jesus. We

have allegiances to our country and our flag that drown out a brother or a sister's appeal for justice. We just won't listen.

We have allegiances to the well being of society that when a person thinks differently about homosexuality or abortion then they are no longer a brother or a sister in Christ and probably are going straight to hell. One of these days God is going to speak loud and clear and tell us to shut, just be quiet. And not one of us will be able to stand justified in any of our positions, simply because we have not listened.

Both Peter and Samuel put themselves in the presence of the Lord and God spoke to them. The only way we can hear the voice of God in this day and age is to be constantly in the presence of the Lord. Society is trying to divide us but we are united by something far stronger than our political parties or our stances on issues. We are united by the blood of Jesus. If we learn how to listen to the Lord, then and only then, will we be able to listen to each other. Amen.