

Revealing the Voice of God

1 Samuel 3:1-10

BREATH AND VOICE OF GOD

Last week we talked about how getting stuck in repentance or following the wrong leader can reveal that people aren't allowing themselves to be influenced by the Holy Spirit. The word "spirit" in Hebrew is *ruach* and in ancient Greek it is *pneuma*. Both words can also be translated as "breath" or "wind" – and in the case of the *Holy Spirit*, it means "breath (or wind) of God." The first time we read of God's breath is in Genesis, chapter 1: "In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while the *ruach* from God swept over the face of the waters." This breath of God was the force behind the words of God: "Let there be light...Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear...Let the earth put forth vegetation...Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures...Let us make humankind in our image..." In Genesis, chapter 2, we read that "God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being." Scripture reveals that God's breath – the Holy Spirit – and God's voice, powered by that same Spirit, has led humankind through history, first by speaking to the children of Israel and later to the Gentiles by way of the eyewitnesses of Jesus' ministry, sacrifice, and resurrection. God's voice continues to lead us now, and I hope my message allows each of us to hear it clearly.

BACKGROUND & SCRIPTURE (1 SAMUEL 3:1-10)

The scripture I chose for this week gives an account of a boy who heard the voice of God, but, since he "did not yet know the Lord, and the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him," he went to his human master – a corrupt priest – to offer his service. This man, despite how cut off from God he had become, was able to lead this child well enough so he could hear God's voice for what it was, which enabled the boy to serve the right master. These are the words of the book of 1 Samuel 3:1-10 →

¹ Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the Lord under Eli. The word of the Lord was rare in those days; visions were not widespread. ² At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; 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! 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 The Lord called again, "Samuel!" Samuel got up 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 The Lord called Samuel again, a third time. And he got up 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 is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place. ¹⁰ Now the Lord came and stood there, calling as before, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

These events took place over 1,000 years before Jesus was born, but after many events that allowed God to create the Israelites from the offspring of an elderly nomadic man and his equally elderly wife. God formed these people through chosen leaders, like Moses and Judges like Deborah and Gideon. These leaders were far from perfect, but the closer they came to fulfilling God's will, the more they helped to shape the Israelites into the people of God.

Eli, the human leader of today's scripture, had strayed far from his calling. He had become complacent and cynical. For example, when Hannah, the woman who would become Samuel's mother, prayed fervently for God to give her a son, Eli accused her of making a drunken spectacle of herself. He didn't exactly see the best in people, did he? Eli had also allowed the priesthood of God to become corrupt. His sons, Hophni and Phineas, who were also priests, stole the finest parts of sacrifices for their own dinner tables, and – while the NRSV of the Bible states they "lay with the women who served at the entrance to the tent of meeting" some scholars believe this to mean Hophni and Phineas used the power of their positions to coerce these servants into having sex with them. Eli confronted his sons but didn't remove them from the priesthood, and they continued to make a mockery of God and the Israelite faith. Is it any wonder that "the word of the Lord was rare in those days [and] visions were not widespread"?

THE GOOD NEWS

This week's scripture doesn't include these details, but it does mention that Eli's "eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see." These words refer to more than physical blindness; by the time of Samuel's calling, Eli had stopped being able to see God. This failure of perception wasn't God's fault; it was a symptom of Eli's complacency. The more he allowed his sons to pervert the priesthood, the more he turned from God's will. Despite this, God was persistent, calling out to Samuel until Eli was finally able to hear God's voice. This was good news 3,000 years ago, and it remains good news for us today. Regardless of how much corruption some leaders of our faith allow; regardless of how much God's influence declines among the people of our communities, nation, and world; God persists and continues to call until people recognize God's voice, enabling them to do their parts of God's will.

Another piece of good news in this scripture is the implication of Samuel's behavior. He responded to God's voice with action. Granted, the first three things he did were misguided, but he was clearly ready for action. He only needed to receive the right guidance for him to rush toward God and recognize God's voice. To me this means that young people who don't yet know the Lord – just as Samuel didn't, are ready for action – just as Samuel was. You can see this in the way many of them join in movements for

justice and strive to do good, not to avoid punishment but because it is what they believe is right. How much more effective would they be if they were empowered and guided by God?

THE VOICE OF GOD

How can these people gain access to this power and guidance – especially during a time when the word of the Lord has been corrupted by people in the public eye who claim to be Christians but fail to behave like Christ? Why would a person who strives to stand against injustice and love people regardless of their culture, race, sexuality, and gender identification want to be guided by a god of rejection and punishment?

This is where we come in. The ones of us who know the truth about an all-loving God of salvation – the ones of us who worship the God of Jesus, in other words – must speak louder and more persistently than the voices who claim a god of judgment and hate. We must reveal the true God to the ones who yearn to serve and love and bring meaning to the lives of those who need it so desperately.

One of the methods we could use to do this would be asking questions like, “Where do you think your sense justice comes from? Why do you want to stand up for those who are crushed by the ignorance or cruelty of people in power? What fuels your passion to serve others, to strengthen relationships, to include those who are different than you are? Who is calling you to goodness? Questions like these open conversation and have the potential of opening the ears of those who seek the true God. When we guide others to hear the voice of God calling out to them, the world will revolve on its axis to face the Lord.