

*Rev. Tara Woodard-Lehman - 9.22.19*

*"Hush" 1 Samuel 3:1-11*

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.

At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; 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. Then the Lord called, "Samuel! Samuel!" and he said, "Here I am!" 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.

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." Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, and the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him.

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. 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.

Now the Lord came and stood there, calling as before, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening." Then the Lord said to Samuel, "See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make both ears of anyone who hears of it tingle.

*Prayer: Loving, Living God, we come here expecting to hear your voice. Quiet our hearts and hush all our wandering thoughts, that we may listen to what it is you have to say to us today. And may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts, be pleasing and acceptable to you. For you are our Rock, and our Redeemer. Amen.*

As many of you know, prior to our move to Pittsburgh, our family lived in New Zealand for nearly three years. While there, we met many lovely Kiwis.

Just to be clear, when I say "lovely Kiwis" I'm not talking about those green, seedy, egg shaped fruit with fuzzy brown skin. When I say "Kiwis" I'm referring to the people of New Zealand whose nickname derives from a quiet, native, flightless, fuzzy brown bird.

Like most Kiwis, my friends were exceedingly gentle, profoundly polite, and more often than not conflict-avoidant. So, when I asked them how Kiwis generally viewed Americans, their responses were courteous and restrained.

But I was genuinely curious. I wanted the real low down. I wanted the full scoop. So I did what most of us do. I turned to google and asked, “What do Kiwis really think about Americans?”

And let me tell you, the results were illuminating!

Sure, there was some difference of opinion, but there were also some clear and consistent themes. The most prominent was this: Kiwis think Americans are a noisy people. Here is just one quote, “It’s not necessarily the American accent that bothers us, it’s the volume. Americans are just too loud.”

And, I must confess, I’ve been occasionally guilty of reinforcing this particular stereotype.

But my volume is, at least in part, because I grew up in an animated, boisterous family. Whether it be talking, crying, loving, fighting, or laughing, we did it all with a certain intensity. It was like the volume was cranked up in nearly every area of life.

Even parts of my faith journey could be characterized as “noisy.” But for the record, I prefer the term “spirited.”

Now, I realize this may be a surprise to those who still buy into the old stereotype that Presbyterians are a serious and stoic people. After all, we’re not called the “frozen-chosen” for nothing! But, as a Pentecostal colleague once explained when introducing me, “Pastor Tara may be Presbyterian, but don’t worry! She’s still got herself a dose of the Holy Ghost.” And she was right. Singing, clapping, and “making a joyful noise unto the Lord” were all part of how I was raised to express my faith.

And although I remain grateful for my noisy country, my boisterous family, and my spirited faith journey, I’ve also learned the value of stillness and the importance of silence.

Those three years in New Zealand gave me permission to slow down and practice the spiritual discipline of “paying attention.” Whether while walking along the rugged, stunning coast (with only the wind and wildlife as my soundtrack) or while hiking solo through the lush, green forests, I encountered God in a new, fresh way.

In those moments of solitude, I rarely listened to music. Though there were a few exceptions. One was an old gospel tune that quieted me, and helped me listen for

God's Voice. The song is called, "Hush. Hush. Somebody's callin' my name." And it goes a bit like this:

*Hush. Hush. Somebody's callin' my name.*

*Hush. Hush. Somebody's callin' my name.*

*Hush. Hush. Somebody's callin' my name.*

*Oh, my Lord, Oh, my Lord, what shall I do?*

Friends, I'm convinced that when we take time to stop, breathe, and quiet ourselves, even for a moment, we become keenly aware that there are many, many voices calling our name.

These voices bombard us. They demand our attention, our time, our energy, and sometimes our very lives. Far too often these voices crowd out the voice of the One that calls us to hush. This voice is the same voice we hear about in today's scripture when God's still, small voice spoke to a still, small boy in the middle of the night, in a temple.

The boy's name was Samuel. Samuel was left under the care of an old priest named Eli, at a very early age. This is because Samuel's mom, Hannah, promised God if she had a son, she would dedicate that son to God's service. And so, when Samuel was born, Hannah fulfilled her promise to God, and sent her son to the temple to learn from the priest, Eli.

In today's story Samuel is probably about 12 years old, and trying to serve God and God's people. But it wasn't easy. Although Samuel lived in the temple, studied under a priest, and practiced religious rituals, scripture tells us that he still did not know the Lord. It seems Samuel was in the same boat as many others both then and now; those who know a lot about the things of God, but who do not actually know God.

Not only that, but it was a difficult time in Israel's history. The land was full of chaos and conflict, and people just weren't hearing much from God those days. In fact, the first thing we're told in today's story, is that "the Word of God was rare at this time and there were not many visions." In other words, God wasn't saying very much. Or at least people weren't listening very well.

Though God's people had already been delivered from slavery and though they had finally entered the long-awaited Promised Land, they still forgot who they were and how to listen to God's Voice. Given his context, it's no wonder Samuel was confused when the LORD called his name. Even the religious leaders of his day

stopped hearing from God. And Samuel was just a kid. If no one else was hearing much from God, why would he?

But finally, after three attempts of God calling out his name, Samuel finally responds with, "Speak LORD, your servant is listening." And the LORD declares, "See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make both ears of anyone who hears it tingle."

This was a critical turning point in Samuel's life and in the life of his entire nation. After this moment, Samuel would share a difficult (and no doubt painful) message with his mentor, Eli. Under the LORD'S direction, Samuel would tell Eli that his family's time in the temple was up; that his term was over. Samuel would have to tell the person who raised him and taught him all he knew about God that the LORD was about to do a new thing with new leadership.

Over time, Samuel would become a priest, a prophet, and a judge; the last judge in Israelite history. And throughout his life, he would continue to listen to God, and speak truth to power. Now, like all of us, Samuel was not perfect. But he was a good leader because he listened and faithfully responded to the voice of God.

The Voice that called out to Samuel still calls out to us today. Often, it speaks when we least expect it. It speaks to us when we are tired. It speaks to us when we feel unqualified and unprepared. It speaks to us in the nights of our lives; those times when we face very real spiritual darkness. It speaks to us when we've forgotten who we are, and the true purpose of worship.

Friends, God's voice has been calling you and pursuing you your whole life. This Voice even now calls you by name. Can you hear it? Are you listening?

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Over the past few weeks I've had conversations with many folks who've shared they feel anxious, distracted, and overwhelmed trying to sift through the cacophony of voices in their lives.

Hearing God's voice is a very real challenge for many of us, especially in our noisy culture; especially with so many voices calling out to us: Voices of employers, employees. Voices of partners and parents. Voices of siblings and children. Voices of those who love us and voices of those who betray us. Voices of politicians and voices of news pundits. Voices of comfort and voices of condemnation. Voices that advise and so many voices that advertise.

Even well-intentioned, well-meaning voices sometimes elbow themselves into our already crowded hearts and minds. So much so, it's almost impossible to hush and

hear the Voice of our Creator; the Voice of the One who knows us the best, and loves us the deepest.

Friends, listen: The same Voice that called Samuel by name calls each and every one of us by *name*.

The same Voice who spoke over the chaos of the waters at Creation, speaks over the chaos of our own lives and world. The same Voice who spoke through judges and kings and prophets is still speaking today in this place, in this church and community. The same Voice that commanded storms to be still, demons to be cast out, and the dead to rise-commands the storms in our lives to be still, the demons we fight to be cast out, and the dead places in our hearts and lives and marriages and families and cities to rise again.

Clearly, when God speaks, things happen: The lame walk. The blind see. The hungry are fed. The arrogant are brought low, and the humble are lifted up. When God talks things happen! Those who were once enemies, find their way to reconciliation. Broken relationships are restored. Those who are on the brink of despair just ready to call it quits find *hope*!

It may sometimes feel like we, too, live in days when “the word of God is rare and there aren’t many visions.” But I believe the LORD is still speaking and calling out to each and every one of us. Still, it’s up to us to hush, be still, pay attention, and listen.

So to close, I invite you to join me in a brief time of stillness, and listen to what God may be saying this morning. This could be what God is saying to you personally, or it could be what God is saying to us together, as a church community.

No matter who you are or where you are in your faith journey, all are invited to now lean into God’s presence and pray with an open heart, being mindful of those simple words, “Speak Lord, your servant is listening.” I will close our time of silence by saying, “Amen.”

Time of silent prayer...

Amen.