

Listening and Anointing
Sunday September 24 2017
Sermon by Michael Turman

Listen. What can you hear?

Whatever else you can hear, today I am going to tell you that God speaks to us. God speaks to us!

Who was our first Bible reading about today? Samuel is an important figure in the Old Testament. He was the last judge and a prophet who ushered in a new form of government for the people of Israel. He was also a very good listener! The children know all about him, because our Sunday School lessons the last two weeks have been all about him. We learned about how God heard Hannah's prayer for a child, and she gave Samuel to serve in the temple. We learned how God called Samuel as a young boy, calling his name in the temple.

Today, in our story, we heard about the Elders of Israel complaining that Samuel's sons were not cutting the mustard as just judges, and that they wanted a king. Samuel is a good listener, even as an old man—even though he disagrees with the elders' request, he prays to find the way forward. And he hears when God says to go through with giving the people a king. God speaks to Samuel, so Samuel is guided to find Saul, and anoints Saul as the first king. This is a new era for the people of God - no longer will

they have judges, people in certain places in certain tribes to lead and guide them; now they will be united under one man who will tax them, take their best stuff, and conscript their children to serve.

God speaks to us. Jesus is another great listener. God spoke to Jesus. In the Gospels, we see him listening to God quite often. He prays in the desert before starting his ministry; in Mark's Gospel, he prays on a mountain before choosing the twelve disciples; he also attends closely to scripture in the synagogue each week. That is where we meet him this week. He reads from the Book of Isaiah, what we know of at Isaiah 61. Not only does he hear these words, but he recognizes in them his calling to "preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord." By claiming that this scripture is fulfilled, Jesus says as clearly as possible that he is the new anointed one, the Messiah, anointed not by a prophet but by Holy Spirit of God to bring about a new era - a new period in earth's history when the poor, the most oppressed and suffering may have hope for healing and release, both physical and spiritual.

God speaks to us! But how does this relate to us? As Christians, we have a share in the Spirit's anointing. By baptism, we die and live again in Christ, making us one in Christ's body. In some churches, anointing with oil is part of the baptism and confirmation rituals as reminders that we share in Christ's calling to preach good news, proclaim liberty and recovery of sight, and freedom from oppression. By our own confession of faith or confirmation, we show our commitment to following in Christ's footsteps in seeking what God wants to do with our lives. Whether we are young or old, God's Word is alive and speaks to us if we are ready to hear it.

God is speaking to us. How can we hear God speak? As people of the church and of the Reformed tradition, we listen for God speaking through the words of Scripture. These books have revealed God's Word to people, generations and generations—they spoke to our mothers and our grandmothers and our great-great-grandfathers in the faith. The scriptures lead the reformers to speak out in faith, just as they lead the early church and those who wrote the New Testament. We can listen for God by spending time reading and studying those scriptures. That is why we read from them every Sunday. It's why we teach these stories to our children, sing from them in our worship, and some of us commit them to memory. It

is why we have Bible encounters, Alpha programs, and Vacation Bible schools and seminaries. We can also listen like Samuel and Jesus, by spending time in prayer and solitude. In setting apart time and space intentionally for silence and care, we can learn to listen for the still, small voice of the spirit's guiding.

God speaks to us today. Have you tried to listen for God's voice? What is God saying to us? From the scriptures we read today, I hear God telling us to **1) Listen to each other.** Samuel listened to the elders, even though he disagreed with them. This is not often easy, especially when our own issues seem so big or the other person's issues seem so small. **2) Listen to God.** Take time to pray and attend to the voice of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Even if it's not the answer we agree with, or desire, God's Word is something we must not ignore if we desire to follow Christ. In my experience, God's Word is often one of great discomfort. It leads me to places I have never been before—life-ruining, soul-shifting change—yet it is the path to ongoing, fill-you-up-overflowing life. **3) Share what we have heard.** Jesus has a word of hope for the poor, the suffering, the oppressed, the blind. God trusts and equips us to pay attention to our neighbours and to be forthcoming about

the grace and hope we have been given, and to go out to share that in any way that people can hear.

“In love, we welcome our neighbours into a faithful relationship with Jesus Christ and one another.” This is our mission! That means sharing the love of Christ, with the many gifts we’ve been given! We can share our talents for sitting quietly beside someone new in the pews; for putting on garage sales. We can share our energy, our time, our property, our worship, our car rides, our words and our songs. That means opening our doors in hospitality to those in need. That means looking out for the needs of those around us.

God speaks to us! If you cannot hear God speak, I want you to choose to listen in the way that feels most appropriate for you. If you are hearing God saying something life-giving, even if it’s faint, I want you to take one step today, right now, as soon as possible toward that life. What do you hear God say?