

Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.
1 Samuel 3:1-10

The word of the LORD was rare in those days;

“The word of the LORD was rare in those days; visions were not widespread.” This is the brief description of the historical situation in which the boy Samuel lived. The voice of God had gone silent and the people of God had gradually forgotten how to listen and discern the voice of God. Maybe that’s why the boy Samuel did not recognize God’s voice when he first heard the call from the Lord. Why couldn’t people hear or see the revelation of God? Remember that Samuel is the last judge of the Israelites and the Book of Judges ends with this verse. “In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit.” (Judges 21:25) The word of the Lord was rare, not because God stopped speaking to God’s people, but because people did whatever they felt like doing. Their eyes and ears were not attuned to God and like Eli, people’s eyesight had begun to grow dim, so that they could not see or hear the revelation of the Lord. As in the time of Samuel, the word of the Lord is rare these days. Our eyes are unable to see the mysteries and sacredness in the world and our ears are not tuned to hear the whisper of God’s voice that surrounds us, because we are living in a disenchanted world.

Disenchantment

How many of you like fantasy films like Harry Potter, the Lord of the Rings or Avatar? I like fantasy films because they display imagination, creativity, and spectacular visual scenes that create a sense of wonder. Who doesn’t like magic? Maybe a science teacher? While more people like fantasy movies nowadays, it is also true that we are living in a disenchanted world. Max Weber, a renowned sociologist, use this term, ‘disenchantment’ to describes the character of a modernized and secularized Western society. In Western society, scientific understanding is more highly valued than religious belief. Weber said, in traditional society, “the world remains a great enchanted garden.” People believe in fairies in the woods, spirits in the wilderness and werewolves in the mountains. Elves, dragons, unicorns, magic and blessings. They were real and the world was filled with great mysteries and wonders. The sense of sacredness was real for people.

However, we, modern people, don’t believe in these things anymore. How many of you believe in Bigfoot? Not many. How many of you feel the sacredness of the altar in our sanctuary? We may feel that “Oh, I like the decoration of the altar today. The Chancel Guild did a wonderful job!” but we don’t often have a sense of the sacred even in this sanctuary. Have you ever felt that this place or another place you have visited was so sacred and holy that you showed your respect by taking off your shoes or hats? It’s very rare for us to have this kind of experience. We, modern people, do not often feel the sacredness of places or things because we are living in a disenchanted world.

One of the good things about living in a disenchanted world is that we are no longer afraid of a dragon eating sun during a solar eclipse. However, it’s also true that we have lost many wonderful things like our capacity for wonder and a sense of sacredness. Think of the last time you were awestruck? When was the last time you were amazed by the majesty of lightening in the sky? When was the last time you were filled with excitement at watching a cloud that looked like a dolphin or the stunning color of a ladybug? As we have lost our sense of wonder and mystery in the world and in life, we have tended to see lightening only as a natural electrical

discharge phenomenon, clouds as visible masses of condensed water vapor, and a ladybug as an annoying little bug.

Moreover, if we have lost the sense of wonder and sacredness, it means that we have also lost our ability to interpret the Word of God. New Testament scholar, Luke Timothy Johnson expresses concern that contemporary Christians are “incapable of experiencing the world in at least some sense as enchanted.” He wrote, “many Christians today no longer see the world as one created by God in every moment, sustained by God’s word, addressed by God’s prophets. Do they still perceive the world as a mystery...? Such a sense of mystery and magic at the heart of reality is... a function of perceiving the world as Scripture imagines it.” I am not arguing that we have to return to a pre-modern worldview. What I would like to say is that we need to learn to see and hear the revelation of God even in this somewhat disenchanted world by recovering our capacity for wonder and the sense of sacredness in the world and life.

To listen to God’s voice, we first need to attend to God. A quiet place is better than a noisy place, but you can do it anytime. Pause for a moment and take a deep breath. Be attentive to what God is doing in this place at this moment. When the Lord speaks to you, you can listen to God’s voice and talk with God. Of course, many contemporary Christians don’t want to be seen as religious fanatics or mentally unstable. So, we are afraid of saying the phrase “the Lord said to me.”

All clergy are required to take a psychological evaluation every seven years. I completed my psychological assessment a few years ago. Part of this assessment is to fill out long questionnaires for several hours. I still remember one question that I struggled with. The question was “Do you hear God speaking to you?” The intention of the question is clear. Right? Such a question in a psychological evaluation intends to determine whether a person has some kind of mental hallucinations. As a pastor, I had to struggle with whether I should answer “Yes” or “No” since I believe God speaks to us today. Do you know how I answered? Of course, I answered ‘Yes.’ But I also understand why many Christians hesitate to say “the Lord said to me.” This is a negative impact of living in a disenchanted world today. We need to overcome this fear by trusting God who is still with us and wants to have a close relationship with us. God speaks to us even today. Be more attentive to God’s voice and do not be afraid of speaking of what you hear. It’s our task to help the next generation of Christians learn to listen to and discern God’s voice.

Eli taught Samuel to listen God’s Calling

“The word of the LORD was rare in those days; visions were not widespread.” People didn’t know how to listen and discern the voice of God, so when God first called Samuel, he thought it was Eli calling him. He ran to Eli and said, “Here I am, for you called me.” He did this three times because he didn’t know who was calling him. Although the word of the Lord had been rare, Eli must have remembered God’s calling and known at least how to attend to the voice of God, so he instructed the boy Samuel, “Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, ‘Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.’” This time, when the voice of God called Samuel, he answered, “Speak, for your servant is listening.” God’s persistence and Eli’s mentoring finally enabled Samuel to discern and listen to God’s voice. The boy Samuel learned how to discern God’s voice and call from Eli and so can we. We learn how to discern God’s call through other faithful people of God, who have come before us.

I remember how my Sunday school teachers taught me how to pray to God. Kneeling, folding my hands, and closing my eyes and praying to God. They helped attune my ears and heart to hear from God. I’m sure you have had your own spiritual mentors or friends who have

helped you to listen for the voice of God. It's now our time to help others, especially, young children, to learn to listen for God's calling. But how?

As you all know, Asbury is preparing a joint Vacation Bible School for our kids with Zion Korean UMC. The theme of the VBS this year is "Camp Firelight" and we will help our kids to learn to connect with and trust God. You can support the VBS through your prayers. You can also make donations for snacks and other activities. On the last day of the VBS, which is Sunday, Asbury and Zion will have a joint worship service and a church picnic together. This will help our kids to feel a sense of love and belonging to a large Christian family, so, your presence is important. Through your prayers, kind words and presence, you can help our kids to feel the presence of God and attune their eyes and ears to God. June 30 is the date, so mark it on your calendars and plan to join our big church event!

Continue to practice listening to God's voice and speaking boldly what you hear. Help and nurture our kids to say "Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening." This is our sacred responsibility and joy. This is what we are called to do and I am sure that the Spirit of the living God will continue to speak through all of us. Amen.