

Dorset South and West Circuit
Service for 17th January 2021 by Pam Woodland

Opening words: Then Samuel said, “Speak, for your servant is listening.”

Hymn: 86 StF

Praise the Lord! You heavens, adore him,
Praise him, angels in the height;
sun and moon, rejoice before him;
praise him, all you stars and light.
Praise the Lord, for he has spoken;
worlds his mighty voice obeyed;
laws that never shall be broken
for their guidance he has made.

Praise the Lord, for he is glorious!
Never shall his promise fail;
God has made his saints victorious;
sin and death shall not prevail.
Praise the God of our salvation;
hosts on high; his power proclaim;
heaven and earth, and all creation;
Laud and magnify his name!

Prayers

We bring our thanks and praise to you for the wonderful world you have given us. We thank you, Lord, for the brightness of winter sun; for winter’s work and winter’s entertainments; for the warmth of home and all its comforts. Lord of all times and all seasons, we thank you that there is no season without its satisfactions, and that there is no time without its promises. Lord, when we have no light, show us the treasures of darkness. Amen

Our prayers of forgiveness were written by Frank Topping:

Lord, why is it so difficult to make peace with each other? No wonder there are wars. Is it pride that holds our mouths tight shut, a childish feeling that we are not the one who should apologise? It wasn’t our fault? In these flare-ups what does it matter whose fault it is? The only thing that matters is love and harmony. Lord, turning our back in anger is weakness. It reduces us to a human being. Give us the courage, the stature, to say, ‘I’m sorry.’ Father God, we know that in our daily lives we have sinned in thought, word and deed, and in what we have left undone. *(take time for quiet reflection)*

To those who confess their sins and are determined to live a new life, Jesus says “Your sins are forgiven.” Amen.

The Lord’s Prayer

Reading: 1 Samuel 3 v 1 – 10 *The Lord calls Samuel*

The boy Samuel ministered before the Lord under Eli. In those days the word of the Lord was rare; there were not many visions. One night Eli, whose eyes were becoming so weak that he could barely see, was lying down in his usual place. 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 answered, “Here I am.” And he ran to Eli and said, “Here I am; you called me.” But Eli said, “I did not call; go back and lie down.” So he went and lay down. Again the Lord called, “Samuel!” And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, “Here I am; you called me.” “My son,” Eli said, “I did not call; go back and lie down.”

Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord: The word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him. The Lord called Samuel a third time, and Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, “Here I am; you called me.” Then Eli realized that the Lord was calling the boy. So Eli told Samuel,

“Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, ‘Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.’” So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

The Lord came and stood there, calling as at the other times, “Samuel! Samuel!” Then Samuel said, “Speak, for your servant is listening.”

Reflection

Are we listening for God to speak to us? Will we be expecting it when he does? Will we hear him speak to us directly or through someone else? Will it be following prayer? Or will it be by way of a sign that we have to interpret? Our reading today, of the child Samuel hearing God’s voice and thinking it was Eli, indicates that God speaks to people when they least expect it.

Sometimes, the Lord speaks to us through signs. Have you ever read David Wilkerson’s book “The Cross and the Switchblade”? I was introduced to his work at a Youth Training Day at Lanehouse many years ago and was amazed at his trust in God’s guidance in the work that was chosen for him to do. His story starts when he was led to be Pastor of a church in Philipsburg, Pennsylvania but when he went to see it for the first time he found the church was the ground floor of a tatty old building with the living accommodation over. He wife found cockroaches in the kitchen and immediately went back to their hotel and packed their bags ready to leave. David had to preach to the congregation that evening so they had to stay until after the service. During the service one of the elders stood up and asked them to stay. They didn’t know what to do so they went outside and prayed together. Here is part of what he wrote:

... Lord, if You want us to stay here in Philipsburg, we ask that You let us know by having the Committee vote for us unanimously. And let them decide of their own accord to fix up the parsonage with a decent refrigerator and stove ...’

The Committee and congregation had taken a vote and everyone wanted David and his wife to stay and agreed to do up the parsonage ... and have it fumigated. God had answered their prayers and shown them the way He wanted them to go. During their time there they built a new church and parsonage and their congregation flourished.

We have to remember that asking for a sign is a bit like the temptations in the wilderness. Jesus replied to one of them 'Don't put your God to the test'. But would we recognise a sign if God spoke to us today and would we be willing to accept any challenge he put to us?

We know that God speaks through others. We remember how Moses did not want to speak on the Lord’s behalf, so Aaron was the speaker and Moses told him what the Lord wanted him to say. Remember the Lord said *“I will help both of you speak and will teach you what to do. He will speak to the people for you and it will be as if he were your mouth and as if you were God to him.”*

Especially at this time of year, we remember the Angel who came to Mary with the message that she would bear the baby Jesus. An Angel had already appeared to Zechariah and told him that his wife Elizabeth would have a boy and he was to be called John.

Do you find that sometimes you can sing a hymn, or read a poem, or read a passage from the Bible, and it is as if it is the first time you have ever heard it. It speaks to you as never before. Or perhaps on a Sunday you feel as if the preacher is speaking directly to you, about things only you could have known, clearing doubts you may have had, showing you how to take the next step forward.

It may happen outside the Church building. You may be in a shop and someone speaks kindly to you when you were feeling low; or you might meet someone you have not seen for a while and they tell you all their news, giving you something to think about when you get home. Perhaps you have a difficult decision to make and by talking it over with a friend or member of the family, you can see clearer what needs to be done. Was this God speaking to you, through a friend listening and passing on advice?

We hear stories of Guardian Angels who look after us. Perhaps you have had an experience when you feel someone has been watching over you. Perhaps you have unknowingly been a Guardian Angel to someone else. We have to listen for that still small voice in our heart telling us what to do, how to live our lives and show God's love to others.

Perhaps God is talking to us through the words of our Covenant Service, when we pledge our obedience to God's commands "*I am no longer my own but yours, Your will, not mine, be done in all things, wherever you may place me ... I willingly offer all I have and am to serve you, as and where you choose.*" He has plans for us all and over time He will guard and guide us in the way He wants us to live our lives.

Matthew 4 v 18 – 22 *The Calling of the First Disciples*

As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. "come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." At once they left their nets and followed him.

Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

Imagine how the first disciples felt when they were called by Jesus. They had no way of knowing what lay ahead of them but when Jesus sent them out into the world he told them "I am with you always." We can always take our thoughts and doubts to God in prayer -as David Wilkerson did - as Moses did – as those firsts disciples probably did. And we know he will be with us always, guiding us along the path he wants us to take.

We don't know how this year will develop – no one could have foreseen the difficulties and hardships that 2020 would bring. We have to move forward and trust in the Lord. We must all be like Samuel and say "**Speak Lord for your Servant is listening**" and act on God's will for us.

Meditation

Lord, we offer you ourselves this day for the work you want accomplished, for the people you want us to meet, for the words you want to be uttered, for the silence you want to be kept, for the places you want us to enter, for the new ways you want pioneered. Go with us along the way, Lord, and enable us to realize your presence at all times and in all places, our loving Lord Jesus Christ.

Prayers of Intercession

Loving God, we do not belong to ourselves but to you; you call us by name; you say to us “Follow me”

You call to us in the world. You speak to us through the voices of prophets, politicians and poets. We pray for those who question our complacency by speaking out against injustice and oppression.

You speak to us through the voices of those with whom we work and live. We pray for those we know whose conversations with us challenge us to show your love in our everyday lives. You speak to us through the voices of the needy, the unwanted, the dispossessed. We pray for the victims of greed and warfare, who cry out to us for help.

Loving God, we do not belong to ourselves but to you. Show us what we should do. Speak, Lord: your servants are listening.

You call to us in the world. You say to us, ‘Follow me’ through a lifetime of loving and giving. We pray for those who need our friendship, those who are neglected, needy, misunderstood. You say to us, ‘Follow me’ into the dark places of sin and suffering. We pray for those who need our support, those who are ill, sorrowful or afraid. You say to us, ‘Follow me’ into the kingdom of light and joy and peace. We pray for those who need to hear the message of the hope to be found in Christ.

Loving God, we do not belong to ourselves but to you. Show us what we should do. Speak, Lord: your servants are listening. In the name of Jesus Christ, our Leader, Teacher and Saviour. Amen.

Hymn 666 StF

1. Master, speak! Thy servant heareth,
waiting for thy gracious word,
Longing for thy voice that cheereth,
Master, let it now be heard.
I am listening, Lord, for thee;
what has thou to say to me?

2. Speak to me by name, O Master,
Let me know it is to me;
speak, that I may follow faster,
With a step more firm and free,
where the Shepherd leads the flock
In the shadow of the rock.

3. Master speak! Though least and lowest,
Let me not unheard depart;
Master, speak! For O thou knowest
All the yearning of my heart,
Knowest all its truest need;
Speak, and make me blest indeed.

4. Master, speak; and make me ready,
when thy voice is truly heard,
with obedience glad and steady
still to follow every word.
I am listening, Lord, for thee;
Master, speak! O speak to me!

Blessing

As we follow the call to “Follow me” may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. And when we say “Speak Lord for we are listening” may the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be amongst us and remain with us always. Amen

