

Jill and I first met in the summer of 1975, dated briefly and broke up. Some 18 months later we met again, late December 1976. This time it 'stuck', as we were engaged on Thanksgiving Day 1977 and married on September 9, 1978. We had planned to begin our family once we settled into my first parish in Hilliard, Ohio, but we had not anticipated all the difficulties, the series of tests and surgeries, that lay ahead of us. I had conceded to never biologically becoming a father, but Jill remained undaunted and the more steadfast of the two of us. In early summer 1980 we received the news that Jill was, in fact, pregnant and our daughter Hannah entered this world on April 21, 1981. We chose this name for our daughter, well aware of the faithfulness of the Old Testament Hannah---herself long unable to conceive a child---and how God graciously gave to her the *Samuel* we read of in our first lesson this morning. Hannah, her son Samuel, and the story before us today are close to my heart.

Hannah, upon learning of her pregnancy, entrusted her son to Eli, chief priest of the temple at Shiloh. Under Eli's supervision Samuel received training in the service of the priesthood. The temple at Shiloh had been corrupted by the misconduct of Eli's sons. We read in 1 Samuel 2:12/ *'Now the sons of Eli were scoundrels; they had no regard for the Lord or for the duties of the priests to the people.'* What a legacy that is! As a result of this corruption at Shiloh, God withheld revelations from the sanctuary, as indicated in 3:1/ *"In those days the word of the Lord was rare; there were not many visions."*

I wonder if the 1100 B.C. world of Samuel is much like our world some 3000 years later? For many in our world, God is considered not only silent, but absent and/or non-existent. I'm thankful for an 18-year old freshman college quarterback, after helping his team win the national championship in OT, who gratefully gave all the glory to God! He has heard God's Word! Faithful, competent, godly-leadership in all corners of our culture seems lacking or, at least, timid. Is God choosing silence and, hence, our world's sick situation... OR ... is our world's situation causing God to choose silence? I'm frankly not sure.

The prophet Amos, around 800 B.C., warned of a famine in the land...not a famine of bread and water, but a *"famine of hearing the words of the Lord."*^[8:11] We read about such a time in our OT text this morning. It is certainly significant it was prayer---specifically Hannah's prayer arising out of her distress---that was answered in the birth of Samuel. I suggest that today, in our famine

of *"hearing the words of the Lord"*, that the faithful prayers of those distressed by the spiritual barrenness of our day are vital, significant, and needed!

I have said before, and our Old Testament lesson offers current confirmation, that the church needs to be more intentional in our listening to God's Word and our speaking of God's Word. It is not inconsequential that young Samuel 'hears' the voice of God, and for the first time as recorded in today's reading. God's revelation often occurs by hearing, rather than in dreams or visions. Last Sunday we read how God created with His spoken word... *"Let there be light!" and there was light"*. [Gen. 1:3] The holy Gospels---Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John---consistently communicate the fact that Jesus speaks *"Follow me"* and with this spoken word invites people into an earthly and eternal relationship with him. All disciples of Jesus learn our vocation...our 'calling'...from these words!

But, are we listening? Two recent statistics that cry out for our consideration:
*18.7% of Americans regularly attend worship...

*19% of Protestant church-goers personally read The Bible every day...

I ask you: Is there a correlation here? Around 19% of Americans regularly attend worship...about 19% of people attending worship personally read The Bible every day. It's been 2800 years since the prophet Amos spoke God's Word to his spiritually-depleted-world and, yet, there appears to still be a *"famine of hearing the words of the Lord."*

St. Paul wrote: *"Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."* [Rm. 10:17] And, this morning, we read and hear that the word of God came to Samuel by hearing. For God's Church to be strengthened, one member at a time, we simply must spend more intentional time in God's Word! For your faith and mine to be nourished and nurtured, we simply must spend more intentional time in God's Word! For each of us who claim to know and follow Jesus, our God-given commission is to speak to and invite others to do the same. Look no further than the example of one of the lesser known original disciples, namely Phillip. He hears and obediently responds to Jesus's invitation to 'follow'. Phillip, then, goes to his brother Nathaniel...somebody he already knew and loved... not a stranger [don't miss this fact!],...and invites him to 'come and see' Jesus.

Is this too complicated?...Follow Jesus, then go to someone you know and tell them of Jesus...introducing one dear friend to another dear friend. But, before we speak, we must hear...thus, this lesson in listening! Amen.

