

1 Samuel 3 v1-10

John 1 v 43-51

We live in a world that is full of busyness and clatter. All this hustle and bustle can make it hard for folk to hear the still, small voice of God. What about us? Are we tuned in to God's voice? Do you hear him when he speaks to you?

I wonder how many of us have ever heard God speak. Perhaps more of us do, but just don't realise so. Are we ready to follow him, like the disciples in the gospel reading?

The first thing we should do to hear God's voice is tune in.

You can't listen to Radio Scotland or Westsound on the radio unless your radio is tuned in to the correct frequency, can you? You can't hear God's voice unless you're tuned in to Him.

In our Old Testament reading, Samuel is lying in the temple, the candles were still lit, so it's night-time and he can't quite get to sleep. His mind's probably racing from everything he learned that day. You see, Samuel was about 8 or 9 years old and he was living with Eli, the priest. His mother had dedicated him to the Lord as a baby, so Samuel as a boy learned the function of a priest under Eli.

So here he is trying to get some rest and he hears somebody call his name. He runs to Eli and says, "Here I am, what did you want?" And Eli replied, "I didn't call you, go back to bed." So, Samuel goes back to bed and the same thing happens. He hears somebody call his name, goes to Eli, Eli says, "It wasn't me," and he goes back to bed. The same thing happens a third time, and this time Eli catches on that God is the one calling Samuel. So, Eli gives Samuel some instruction on hearing from God and he goes back to bed, hears the voice of God, and then listens to what God has to say.

You see, at the beginning, Samuel didn't quite know what was going on.

He thought that Eli was calling him. He wasn't tuned in to God; the Scripture says, "the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him." If he was tuned in to God, he would have known that it was God who was speaking to him, and he would have heard clearly all the instruction that God had for him.

So, what about us? Are we tuned in to God? Can you tell when He's speaking to you? Maybe this illustration might help.

A Native American and his friend were in downtown New York City, walking near Times Square in Manhattan. It was during the noon lunch hour and the streets were filled with people.

Cars were honking their horns, taxicabs were squealing around corners, sirens were wailing, and the sounds of the city were almost deafening.

Suddenly, the Native American said, "I hear a cricket [grasshopper]."

His friend said, "What? You must be crazy. You couldn't possibly hear a cricket in all of this noise!"

"No, I'm sure of it," the Native American said. "I heard a cricket."

"That's crazy," said the friend.

The Native American listened carefully for a moment, and then walked across the street to a big cement planter where some shrubs were growing.

He looked into the bushes, beneath the branches, and sure enough, he located a small cricket. His friend was utterly amazed. "That's incredible," said his friend. "You must have super-human ears!"

"No," said the Native American. "My ears are no different from yours. It all depends on what you're listening for."

"But that can't be!" said the friend. "I could never hear a cricket in this noise."

"Yes, it's true," came the reply. "It depends on what you're listening for. Here, let me show you."

He reached into his pocket, pulled out a few coins, and discreetly dropped them on the pavement.

And then, with the noise of the crowded street still blaring in their ears, they noticed every head within twenty feet turn and look to see if the money that tinkled on the pavement was theirs.

"See what I mean?" asked the Native American. "It all depends on what you're listening for."

If you've tuned in to God, it doesn't matter what's going on around you, you can hear Him speak.

There are a number of ways that God can speak to us.

We read through the Old Testament and see the different stories of how God spoke to certain people. Like when God spoke to Noah to build a huge boat.

Or when God spoke to Abraham and told Him he could have all the land where he set his foot. How about when God spoke to Moses through a burning bush. Or even in the New Testament when God spoke to Mary through an angel and told her she would have His baby. Or when Jesus spoke to Phillip and Nathaniel. And we can't help but think, "Wow, I wish God would speak to me like that." But you know what would happen if God spoke to us like that?! It may scare us half to death. A lot of people think God speaks through "signs" or "burning bush" experiences, but that's really very rarely how God speaks today.

While God doesn't necessarily reveal himself to us in those ways today, He does reveal himself in various other ways.

God can speak to us through His Word and the preaching of His Word.

Psalm 119:105 "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."

God's word is so important for us. It should be part of our daily spiritual diet. The more we read of the bible, the more attuned we are to His Holy Spirit. It's all very well to hear a good sermon but I think it is good to remember that some of the finest sermons ever preached have been when an arm has been touched, a smile given, a helping hand offered or even a cup of tea given.

The late Rev. Arrick Wilkinson used to say something like, "preach the Gospel and if all else fails, use words" And these are all things that we can do.

Sometimes actions speak louder than words.

Romans 8:16 "16 The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,"

This is also known as the inward witness or inward intuition. The Holy Spirit can verify that you're doing the right thing or going the right way. If you're going in the wrong direction, or making the wrong decision, you'll feel an uneasiness on the

inside. Well, that's the Holy Spirit letting you know something's up. Sometimes we call it the "still, small voice". It's your own spirit speaking to you and it mostly speaks in just a word or a phrase. Maybe if you're planning on doing something or going somewhere, the inward voice may say, "Wait," or "Not Yet," or "Stop." So, chances are, you've had the opportunity to hear God's voice at some point or another, but still, the question remains, "Are you listening?" If we are distracted, then we can miss what God may be saying to us. There are a number of things that can distract us today. Maybe there's something you won't let go of that's keeping you separated from God.

In order for us to hear God clearly, we should try to get rid of distractions in our lives. We should be tuned in to God so that no interference can cut in at all. Have you ever been listening to the radio? You're enjoying the programme, and then you hear static and somebody's voice or another song coming through for just a second or two? That's interference. It could possibly mean that you're out of range. That you've moved too far away from the source. Well, if you're experiencing interference while trying to hear from God, it could be that you've moved farther away from the source. So, to get rid of the interference, try to cut out the distractions, and draw near to God.

How do we draw near to God? How do we get hear his voice?

In order for someone to hear His God's call, then sometimes we are to be the voice. Like Phillip speaking to Nathaniel, there may be times when we are called to be the voice of God. Perhaps an invite to watch the service or some other event may be just what that person needs in their personal walk of faith.

Well, we could learn more about Him and what He wants. How do we do that? -

Study the word of God. Another thing we could do is to practice listening.

It is said that practice makes perfect. When we study God's word, we should ask ourselves, what could God be trying to tell me through this? When we pray, we should try to have a time of reflection as in the Psalms. "Be still and know that He is God."(Psalms 46:10)

The closer we get to the Shepherd, the clearer we will hear His voice.

I pray that each and every one of us will, like Samuel, Phillip and Nathaniel, put our trust in Jesus and follow Him in our lives.

Because when we do so, He will always be with us, comforting, strengthening and caring for us through times both good and bad.

Amen.