

Trinity 1

Listen! Can you hear anything? What can you hear?

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It's sometimes important to keep our ears open and if we can't do that physically then to be aware as much as we can of what is going on around us. If we hear and we're receptive to what is going on around us, we can make a response to a situation. If someone asks you to pass on a message, it's important if you hear what the message is in the first place. If someone calls out for help, perhaps they're penniless or desperate in some way, if we hear their cries for help, we might be able to do something for them. If someone asks you to do something because they believe you can do it, it might be worth responding to that request, as you might make a difference. A difference to a situation, a difference to other people's lives. Or your response might just simply make something happen.

But of course for all the hearing we do, we don't have to listen properly. We might choose not to pass on the message. Or try to and discover that we didn't listen properly. We may choose to ignore the needy person who cries out for help. We may choose to ignore the difference we can make to a situation or to people's lives. Perhaps we don't want to make something happen.

Things do happen in the world though, because of people listening, both with their ears and in the openness of their hearts. There is a monastic saying which talks of listening to God as listening with the ear of your heart. Through faith some are called to be priests; some are called to be youth workers; some are called to be pastoral, visiting and helping folk. Some are called to listen. Others are called to be specifically kind and encouraging or patient. Perhaps you're called to help with the admin in church or be a treasurer churchwarden. Or maybe to volunteer at the local foodbank.

You could just go on!

We often say certain vocations are callings and many feel called in a non faith way. But as Christians we do believe there are callings for religious reasons and the person who calls us is God.

Can we hear him? Well if we keep our ears open and importantly our hearts and minds, we might just hear God. And God wants us to hear. A because he wants us to know he is there. There for us. And B because he calls us. He calls us to do a to do good things as his people. Whatever it might be.

Sometimes when God calls us, we choose to ignore him. It's easier and less demanding if we don't do what God wants us to do. Perhaps we don't want to stretch ourselves too much. Sometimes we hear a calling but we don't realise it's God. 'Who keeps calling me? Where does that come from? Well let's not give up. Maybe we ought to find out. Perhaps it's a call from God?

In our Old Testament reading today from 1st Samuel we have a calling. The young boy Samuel who is about eleven is serving under the priest Eli at the shrine of Shiloh. One of the most important shrines in ancient Israel. We hear that 'the word of God was rare in those days, visions were not widespread.' It seems like the people of God were not listening to their God.

Samuel and the ageing priest Eli had gone to bed. Eli is in his room and Samuel is in the temple, where 'the lamp of God had not yet gone out.' Samuel hears his name called. 'Samuel! Samuel!' and he says. 'Here I am', and runs to Eli. Eli says to the boy. 'I did not call, lie down again.' And Samuel goes back to bed. But he hears his name called again and Samuel gets up and goes to Eli. 'Here I am for you called me. But Eli says. 'I did not call my son. Lie down again.'

We hear that Samuel did not yet know the Lord. He doesn't know who is calling him. And so the third time Samuel is called, he goes again to Eli. There's no doubt about it, Samuel is being called. He could however have been forgiven for turning over and going back to sleep the third time. But he didn't. He just needed to listen a bit harder.

Eli now perceives that Samuel was being called by the Lord and this time he tells the boy to lie down, 'and if he calls you, you shall say, "Speak Lord, for your servant is listening."'

And listen he did. Samuel would grow up to play a key role as a prophet in the development of ancient Israel. Of course it would have been easier and less demanding if Samuel had chosen to ignore the call. He wouldn't have had to stretch himself too much. The fourth time God called, Samuel could have grown tired and thought, 'I've had enough now.' But he said, 'Speak Lord for your servant is listening.'

And listen he did.

The question to us is. Can we hear a call? Can we hear a call amidst all the things that are going on in our lives, with all its distractions? Do we want to listen? Or do we just ignore God's call like the Pharisees in our Gospel reading today. God was in their very midst in the person of Jesus, but they wouldn't listen to him and even plotted against him.

Well let's try and listen to him. Make the effort. Let's be alert. Prick our ears back and answer God's call, rather than just turn over and go back to sleep. And when we know who's calling us, let us listen with the ear of our heart.

Amen