

“Speak, LORD, for Your Servant is Listening”

✧ to scatter the darkness (vv.1-7)

✧ to light up my life (vv.8-10)

In the name of Christ Jesus the Word of God in human flesh and blood, dearly redeemed:

How much of you life can you really control? Your health? Perhaps until that runaway growth of cells called cancer. Your marriage? Things can be going great, but then something happens leaving both you and your spouse wondering, “What’s this about?” Society? The world? Government? Maybe you’d just like to set your alarm clock right, but then who’s to say you’ll actually wake up in the morning? Is there anything you can actually control? Yes, just one thing. We learn it from a failing priest and his young protégé: **“Speak, LORD, for Your Servant is Listening.”**

✧ to scatter the darkness (vv.1-7)

Imagine living in a world where everyone did whatever they wanted. No one listened to good rulers, but preferred the ones who told them what they wanted to hear. The most vocal citizens claimed the right of life and death over their own children. Children were disobedient to their parents, did not listen to authority, did whatever they pleased. Everyone cheated on their spouse or did not bother with marriage at all. Whatever was good, they called evil. And the evil, they claimed, was good! God-fearing people might be wondering, “How did we ever get here?” But “here” is not America today. I’m talking about ancient Israel. During the time of the Judges we’re told, **“In those days there was no king in Israel, and every man did whatever was right in his own eyes.”** (Judges 17:6; 21:25 EHV¹)

So maybe a good place to send your son for proper instruction might be the temple? It was a tent at Shiloh, served by a priest named Eli. Good father? Here’s a description of Eli’s sons. Along with stealing the best of the offerings, **“they were sleeping with the women who served at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting.”** (2:22) God was holding Eli responsible for letting his sons get out of control.

The one thing they could control, everyone neglected. The Holy Scriptures of the Bible at that time were just the first five books of Moses, Genesis-Deuteronomy. The only copies were kept at the Tabernacle-Tent, but even there the priests rarely read them. No one seemed to realize that a famine of God’s Word (Amos 8:11f) was coming down on their country and destroying souls in darkness.

Young Samuel, perhaps a teenager at this time, was dedicated to God by his devout mother Hannah. From early youth he had lived under Eli’s care. Samuel was responsible for opening the doors of the Lord’s house in the morning and trimming the lamps with enough oil to last through the night. **“The word of the LORD was rare in those days. Prophetic vision was not common.”** More literally, there were no *break-through* visions to dispel the darkness of ignorance and unbelief. That was about to change.

Three times in the early morning hours Samuel was awakened by someone calling his name. He’d faithfully run to Eli and ask what to do, only to be told, **“I did not call. Lie down again.”** Finally it dawned on Eli that the LORD God was calling Samuel. Have you ever wished you might have been there? With God calling your name? Just so you could ask God some questions? But there’s the problem. We want God to answer our questions. Samuel only asked, **“Speak, LORD, your servant is listening.”**

¹ Scriptures, *Evangelical Heritage Version*® (EHV®) © 2019 (www.wartburgproject.org). NPH: 800-662-6022

We so quickly forget that God does not even owe us a call, much less answers to our questions. And instead of just one vision like this, we have the whole record of God's grace across the ages, right here in the Bible from Genesis through Revelation. Sinful pride demands answers from God. Humble repentance leaves all things to God's control. When simple, childlike faith prays, "Thy will be done," it's just another way of saying, **"Speak, LORD, for Your Servant is Listening."**

Are you listening when God's servants proclaim the Word to you today? Or are you like the royal court of France under King Louis XIV? Powdered wigs, high-heeled shoes and gaudy costumes listened to the most eloquent of French preachers. Jacques Benigne Bossuet pleaded with the nobility to rule justly and leave behind their adulterous lives. Tears flowed. Heads nodded. Lives remained unchanged.² Very much like the Israelites (or Americans) no matter how many times the Lord disciplined them, heard their prayers and sent another judge as a deliverer. Yet in mercy the LORD came **to scatter the darkness** and...

☆ to light up my life (vv.8-10)

Notice something very important here. Samuel did not ask for this. Others like Moses and Jeremiah wanted the LORD to send someone else. Ezekiel went, but **"in bitterness and in the anger of my spirit, with the strong hand of the LORD upon me."** (Ezekiel 3:14 NIV84) The mortal mind and body is so fragile that prophetic vision can be almost unbearable. For example the **"highly esteemed"** prophet Daniel (9:23), had to plead with the LORD for strength just to breathe (10:7-19). No wonder that parents and faithful preachers in these Last Days sometimes feel weary. Listening, living and proclaiming the powerful Word is hard work far beyond our mortal ability without God's help.

And yet the one thing we can control is to expose ourselves to God's Word day-by-day. God's Word brings its own power through faithful parents, pastors, teachers and Christian friends. At first we all turn away in ignorance or stubborn pride. But just as the LORD kept coming until Samuel was ready to listen, so for us, where there's life, there's hope. To bring you to the Word-powered water of Baptism, the dear Holy Spirit keeps calling. You may remember that last week it took an earthquake before the jailer at Philippi was really ready to listen. What will it take for God to open your ears and prepare your heart? We all need troubles and trials for that. But once God has His Name on you in that life-giving Sacrament of born-again water (Titus 3:5-7), God's kindness and love wants you and me to keep saying, **"Speak, LORD, for Your Servant is Listening." Light up my life** to be a blessing to others.

Samuel could not control where the country would go from there. The next morning Eli made him tell the hard truth from the LORD that both Eli's sons would die. As it turned out, the symbol of God's presence, the ark of the covenant would be stolen by the Philistines from defeated Israel. Apparently, the Philistines also came and destroyed the whole tabernacle complex at Shiloh. It would be about twenty years (7:2) before God's Word would return for victory and blessing on God's chosen nation of Israel. Meanwhile, the only thing that Samuel could control? **"Speak, LORD, for Your Servant is Listening."**

Still today the key is **Listening** as our Epiphany Lord Christ scatters the darkness and lights up your life. Are you anxious? Listen: **"Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you."** (1 Peter 5:7 EHV) Are you just tired? Listen: **"Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."** (Matthew 11:28 EHV) Are you wandering? Listen: **"Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will direct your paths."** (Proverbs 3:5f NKJV) Are you stumbling in pride? Listen: **"Humble yourselves under God's powerful hand so that he may lift you up at the appointed time."** (1 Peter 5:6 EHV)

Listening to God's Word is what carried Samuel forward as the last of the Judges. Finally Samuel was privileged to anoint the second king, the sweet Psalmist of Israel, King David. Give your heart to listening there, and find God listening to heartfelt prayer. Amen.

² Morgan, Robert J. *On This Day* – September 27, "Staring in the Mirror." © 1997. Thomas Nelson, Inc. www.laridian.com. For *The Preacher's Apprentice (TPA)* sermon study or copies: m.cordes@comast.net. New Life Evangelical Lutheran Church You can also call: 651-484-1169. Hear the sermon at www.newlifeshoreview.com. 180 County Rd F - Shoreview, MN 55126