

**SERMON FOR SUNDAY 2 B  
Birkenhead 2018**

I wonder if you ever talk to yourself? I often do. I don't know if it's a personality thing or if everyone does it. But thankfully I've never been answered back.

Unlike Samuel I haven't heard voices. My call to priesthood wasn't the result of hearing a voice call to me. It was something that happened over a period of time. It came through other people talking to me, events that happened, reading the scriptures, prayer, watching others in ministry. These were some of the ways I tried to discern what God wanted me to do.

No voices in the night like Samuel. Had I heard a voice I don't know what I would have done. I would probably be startled, puzzled and a bit afraid. When Samuel heard the voice he wasn't startled or puzzled, he just thought Eli was calling him. Even the wise old priest Eli wasn't sure what to make of it for it took three visits from Samuel before he realised what was happening. Then the fourth time he heard the voice Samuel said "Speak Lord your servant is listening."

I think for most of us its “listen Lord for your servant is speaking.” Somehow we have to change our attitude to God. Rather than lengthy prayers asking for this that or the other, we may be better to remain silent.

Silence is such a difficult thing for us to cope with. When I go for a run in the mornings I am amazed at how many people have earphones in their ears listening to something as they walk or run. I used to do this, but stopped a few years ago and it has made an amazing difference. Now I see those people and think about how they miss the rustle of leaves, the city waking, the birds singing and of course, the silence. Mostly they miss what is really going on in their own mind. We are bombarded with noise and it very conveniently stops us from being in touch with our own selves.

Silence seems such a passive thing. We are so involved in doing things that we cannot sit still for long. Unfortunately silence demands less activity in terms of bodily movement, but it demands more activity in brain function.

If we want to hear God speaking to us, then we will need to sit with another person and listen carefully to their conversation – for God speaks through others. We will need to be still and ponder the things which happen around us –for God speaks through daily

events. If we want to hear God speaking to us then we will need to be prayerful and develop a relationship with the Spirit of God who dwells in us – for God speaks in our inmost being.

I sometimes think it would have been so much easier if I had been around with Jesus when he was on earth. Like the disciples I would have seen him and heard his speak directly to me. Then I would have known what to do. But if I'm honest I think I may well have been like sceptical Nathaniel. "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" I would have said like he did. But then I would have had to eat my words and made a confession of faith like he did. That still happens.

Having the living person present isn't always as easy as we might think. Yet not having the physical presence has not prevented us from being called by God. We so often talk about being called by God only in reference to the priesthood. Every one of you here is called by God, called for different tasks and in different ways. If God had not called us we wouldn't be here today. We come in response to what we know and have heard about God. Some of us will have learnt of the presence of God in our lives at an early age thanks to the teaching of parents, Sunday school teachers, or a church community. Some will have benefited from a sudden or

gradual illumination from within, maybe guided by the help of a friend or counsellor

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If we look back at our own call, at our awareness of the presence of God, we are likely to see that somewhere there was the aid of another person in helping us to recognise and respond to the presence of God. Although our experiences of God differ and the circumstances of the call may differ, we realise we need the assistance of each other in order to hear God's call and be able to respond to it. It's a community thing.

It is worth noticing that God's call comes first and we respond. It is God who makes the first move towards us then we act. So often we talk about finding God as if we have to search for a God who is lost or has hidden himself in a game of hide and seek. We make things difficult for ourselves if we think we have to find God or search for faith. Time and again the biblical stories remind us that God seeks us. God is the one to make the first move yet we persist in talking about "my search for God". With that outlook we make faith into something we have to do to find God.

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Instead we can develop an attitude of looking for God's presence among us, listening for God speaking within or through others.

God is the one who seeks us out so we may know the joy of his loving presence. Our God does not hide away for us to find. God comes to us and calls us to follow his life of love. If we have the tiniest spark of faith then we know God is present. If we think we may have caught a small glimpse of God, then God is present.

We are the ones who need to open ourselves more to the presence of God in our daily lives. Instead of “Speak louder Lord for your servant is busy and there’s lots of noise and distraction”; it is rather “speak Lord for your servant is listening.” We stop and listen for God in the silence of our own hearts, we listen for God in the things others say; we listen for God in the words of Scripture and worship; we listen for God in the things which happen to us.

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Within our lives we find God is continually calling us to see life from God’s perspective. We listen so we may perceive the presence of God with us and how we might respond to that presence with loving action. Then our response will be a reflection of God’s love and so we will draw others to see God’s presence among us.

Perhaps it is time we took out our earphones and listened.