



Church at Home for January 17th 2021

Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening

1 Samuel 3:10

As the latest lockdown continues, and the painful news about infections and deaths is daily mixed up with hopes surrounding the rollout of the vaccines, there is a lot to pray for. Over the last 2000 years, Christians have often had to live through difficult times; sadly, plagues and pandemics are not new. In one such time during the 16th century Luther wrote this: *'Use medicine, shun persons and places whatever your neighbour does not need your presence, and act like a man who wants to help put out the burning city. For what else is the epidemic but a fire which devours life and body?'* And two centuries earlier Mother Julian of Norwich wrote down her visions of Jesus from the isolation of her cell at the height of The Black Death. In the first and second centuries of the church it was the Christians who bothered about the plague victims, taking risks to care for others, whereas the Roman authorities just left people to die. In this season of Epiphany, how we pray and how we care in this national crisis is one way in which we reveal the glory of God. It starts with listening to God and today's stories are about hearing God calling us and giving us our particular work to do.

Here are the Bible readings for this Sunday:

[1 Samuel 3:1-10, \(11-20\)](#) - Young Samuel, while serving the elderly priest Eli in the temple at Shiloh, hears God's personal call to him

[Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18](#) - The Psalmist writes with amazement a song of praise about God who has known us even before we were born and who is with us every step of our lives

[1 Corinthians 6:12-20](#) - The apostle Paul reminds his readers that we are now God's Temple and that we should live responsibly in this knowledge, becoming the place where God speaks to and through us

[John 1:43-51](#) - Philip introduces his friend Nathaniel to Jesus. Nathaniel is amazed that Jesus knows all about him and that Jesus is calling him to be a disciple

Here are some suggestions for hymns and songs:

[Hark my soul it is the Lord](#)

[Take my life and let it be](#)

[I the Lord of sea and sky](#)

[Will you come and follow me](#)

[Are you listening \(Michael Card\)](#)

[I heard the voice of Jesus say](#)

[Dear Lord and Father of mankind](#)



A Collect for Epiphany 2

*Gracious God,
by night and day you summon your slumbering people;
so stir us with your voice
and enlighten our lives with your grace
that we give ourselves fully
to Christ's call to mission and ministry. Amen*

Take a moment to bring the past week before God, remembering the good and the bad things that have happened. Reflect on what God is saying to you, your family, the church and the world during this third lockdown. Also ask the Holy Spirit to bring to mind those words, thoughts and deeds that have let God and yourself down. As you say sorry, ask for God's forgiveness through Christ and God's help to start again:

Jesus says to us: **Your sins are forgiven. Your faith has made you well. Go in peace**

*Christ our morning star,
may the brightness of your rising
fill us with faith and hope
even in the darkest hours;
for without you, we lose our way*

Some initial reflections on the theme of hearing God's voice



I wonder whether you've ever had the experience of trying to retune an old radio so that in future you can find the stations you want. It can be bewildering discovering just how many different radio stations there are out there and how close they are to each other. And it's even more mind-blowing when we realise how many different sounds there are surrounding us in the airways every moment of every day. It can be hard enough to find the human voices we want to hear, let alone listen to God! One encouragement from the readings for this Sunday is that God does want to speak and when God does, the Lord calls us by name. Most of us are attuned to hearing our own name even in a noisy room. So how do we listen out for God each day? Perhaps it involves finding silence in a special place as was true for Samuel at night in the temple. Maybe it means getting away on our own and sitting quietly somewhere like Nathaniel beneath the fig tree. Or it could be making time to the read words of the Bible such as those in Psalm 139 which is a favourite passage for so many of us. And maybe, like Nathaniel and Samuel, we need help from friends and guardians to hear what God is saying to us. Whatever works for you, it needs to be intentional and regular if we are to hear what God is saying because there is so much that gets in the way of hearing God's voice in the noise of day to day living. Will you covenant with God this week to spend more time listening rather than speaking in prayer and to tune in to the frequencies of God that are all around us?



For our prayers, let us remember:

Hospital staff treating patients suffering from COVID 19; relatives waiting anxiously to visit; and those waiting for other operations; those in Care Homes and those who are able to visit; today's news headlines and any particular situations and people in other countries that God has placed on your heart; those known to us who are facing hardship, who are anxious or who have been bereaved.

Add any other particular people and situations that The Holy Spirit brings to your mind as you have been praying and then say our family prayer, **The Lord's Prayer**.

End the time of church-at-home by saying out loud the words of **The Grace**, reaching out your hands to include in your imagination all those you know and love, who live here in the village and beyond

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For further reflection



- Light a candle to remember Christ's presence with you.
- Sit five to fifteen minutes in silent meditation paying close attention to the deep breath.
- Imagine that you hear the Lord as Samuel did.
- What captures your attention in the painting?
- Stay with that which captures you.
- What do you hear?
- Imagine that you hear the Lord again as Samuel did.
- Is there another part of this image that captures you?
- Stay with that which captures you.
- What do you hear?
- Imagine that you hear the Lord again as Samuel did.
- Hold the images that have captured you.
- Close your eyes.
- Listen for God's message for you.
- Open your eyes and gaze at the image one more time.
- Notice what captures you now.
- Is there a call to action from God?
- Give thanks to God for this time in prayer and listening. Give thanks for any new insights you have received.

Disclosure

Prayer is like watching for the Kingfisher. All you can do is Be where he is likely to appear, and Wait.
Often, nothing much happens; There is space, silence and Expectancy.
No visible sign, only the Knowledge that he's been there, And may come again.
Seeing or not seeing cease to matter, You have been prepared.
But sometimes, when you've almost Stopped expecting it, a flash of brightness Gives encouragement.

Ann Lewin

A prayer for each day this week

Heavenly Father,
Let today be a day of listening,
Both to voices we know and trust already,
And also to those who offer us different
views
Or new ways of thinking about familiar
things.
Grant that we may discern your voice
in the words of others.

Amen

*'You are mine' by David Walker, published by
BRF*

**If you do all the talking
when you pray, how will
you ever hear God's
answers?
Aiden Wilson Tozer**

Activities for the whole family

[Here](#) is the Gospel story from John 1 with wooden figures and wondering questions

[Here](#) is a simple sung version of the Samuel story

Some thoughts about the Samuel story

We all long to hear God speaking to us. Whether it comes through a Bible story, the advice of a Christian friend or a quiet voice in our head, a word from God can change everything. But sometimes God seems to have his mobile on silent! It felt like this for Eli the Priest and the People of God at the time of this story. What a surprise then, that when God did speak, he chose to give a message to a little child! Samuel could hear God's voice clearly but didn't realise that it was God who was speaking. It took great humility on Eli's part to recognise that God had chosen to speak to his 'trainee altar boy' rather than to him. God often surprises us like this and, like Eli, we need to be ready to receive a message from God, even if it comes in an unexpected way. Eli advises Samuel what to say when he next hears the voice and so helps him to begin a life of listening to God that would change him and transform the nation.



Some questions to ask each other

1. Why do you think God chose to speak to Samuel rather than Eli?
2. How do you think God speaks to people today?
3. Have you ever heard God speak to you?
4. Do you think that God may be speaking to us through this story?

Visual Aid

Use a transistor or digital radio and together have fun tuning into as many different stations as you can along one wave band. Just think how many unheard sounds there are, all around us in the air, once we know the way to listen in!

Activity idea

Play a listening game together. Set a minute on the timer facility of your mobile and then all agree to keep completely silent for that time. Everyone should make a mental note of all the sounds they hear. Then talk about what each of you heard. Try this again, but now make it a minute of listening prayer starting with: *We're listening Lord*. Ask everyone to notice some of the many thoughts that come into their heads. What do they think God might have been saying? [Grown-ups, be ready like Eli to accept that God might choose to speak to the children rather than you!]

Prayer idea

Prayer is as much about listening to God as speaking to him. Try making deliberate space for listening when you pray together today. Pause after every short prayer that you say and keep silent for about 15 seconds. Agree that each of you will do this. As the signal for the short silence, you could all say a version of Samuel's words together: *We're listening, Lord*.