

COLLEGE CHAPEL TALK

SAMUEL

by the Rev. Walter E. Orthwein

Readings: 1 Samuel 3:10

“And the Lord came, and stood, and called as at other times, Samuel, Samuel. Then Samuel answered, Speak, for Your servant hears.” (1 Samuel 3.10)

When Samuel’s mother had a child, after much praying for one, she named him Samuel, a name that means “Heard of God,” because the Lord had answered her prayer. As soon as he was old enough, she took him to serve in the Tabernacle with the old priest, Eli.

One night after Samuel had gone to bed, the Lord called his name. Three times the Lord called, and three times Samuel, thinking it was Eli calling him, went to the old priest and said “Here I am.” Finally, Eli realized that it was the Lord calling the boy and told him how to respond the next time.

“And the Lord came, and stood, and called as at other times, ‘Samuel, Samuel’. Then Samuel answered, ‘Speak, for Your servant hears.’” And so, Samuel began a long and useful life as the Lord’s appointed leader of Israel.

Samuel’s mother called upon the Lord, and He heard her. The Lord called Samuel, and Samuel heard Him. Communication involves messages sent and received. The Writings for the New Church say that conjunction with the Lord is “reciprocal”—meaning we must respond to the good and truth, the life, that He sends us. Prayer is defined as “speech with God,” in which we not only talk to God, but receive messages from Him.

The Lord calls everyone. And He calls us by name, meaning that He knows our quality, and speaks to us individually, in a way accommodated to each person’s ability to respond.

Samuel was only a boy, and it was night when the Lord called him, and he was asleep, or at least trying to sleep. And he was mistaken about who was calling him. All of this represents a state of obscurity, of spiritual immaturity. But this is what the Lord calls us out of.

He calls to rouse us out of the spiritual lethargy we’ve been in—to get us off our mental bed of easy assumptions and natural habits of thought and give us a purpose in life. He calls us to a life of service to Him.

The Lord calls everyone, but not everyone answers. Some ignore the call, some do not recognize the Source of the call, some do not hear it at all. Sometimes the Lord speaks in a still, small voice, which you won't hear unless you're listening for it. And even if His voice is as loud as thunder or a waterfall, as it sometimes is, we have to be able to distinguish what He is saying.

“If anyone has an ear, let him hear.” The Lord often said that at the end of a parable. It makes us think that the use of life in this world, and especially the life of the church, is to grow spiritual ears—that is, develop a sensitivity to the Lord's voice.

To “hear” means to be willing to obey. To “see” means to understand. Because Samuel *heard* the Lord, and was willing to serve Him, the Lord could show him the path of life, could enable him to understand what he should do.

We need spiritual ears and spiritual eyes, because it is in the spirit, or mind, that hearing and seeing really take place.

Beethoven was deaf, but he had an ear for music that was better than anyone else's. Helen Keller was blind, as well as deaf, but the light of truth that filled her mind was a delight and comfort to her, and she heard the Lord's voice. She knew she was more blessed than many people with perfect eyesight and hearing who were blind and deaf to spiritual reality.

Natural sound and light correspond to spiritual good and truth. And the two worlds, natural and spiritual, really make a one. To whatever degree a person is insensitive to the Divine and the spiritual reality behind natural things, he isn't fully experiencing even the natural things.

The light reflected off the clouds at sunset doesn't just affect the eye, but the spirit; it would be sad if it didn't. The sound of a stream running over rocks, of birds singing in the morning, of insects at night, of musical instruments, and especially of human voices, affects the spirit as well as the ear.

New Church education is dedicated to teaching all subjects in such a way as to open our spiritual eyes and ears—that is, to make us sensitive to the Divine goodness and truth revealed in the Word and represented in human life, and in all creation.

Let us pray that when the Lord calls us, we may answer as Samuel did: “Speak, Lord, for Your servant hears.” Amen.