

**Luke 5:1-11** <sup>ESV</sup> <sup>1</sup> On one occasion, while the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret, <sup>2</sup> and he saw two boats by the lake, but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. <sup>3</sup> Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon's, he asked him to put out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people from the boat. <sup>4</sup> And when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." <sup>5</sup> And Simon answered, "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets." <sup>6</sup> And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking. <sup>7</sup> They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. <sup>8</sup> But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." <sup>9</sup> For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish that they had taken, <sup>10</sup> and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men." <sup>11</sup> And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.

## “Hearing the Word”

Hearing the word, that's a difficult topic to address. What do we mean by hearing and what do we mean by “the word.” Is hearing just hearing or does it involve more? By “the word” do we mean the Bible, the words of Scripture or do we spell it with a capital W and mean hearing Jesus personally? The answer to the first question about hearing is pretty straight forward. For the Hebrew hearing meant not just hearing sounds, but obeying what you heard particularly when it came to the LORD. If God spoke you did what he said otherwise you have not heard. To hear is to obey.

Moving on to the next question, obviously when we talk about hearing the word we are talking about hearing God. Now I suspect that for most of us this thing of God speaking directly and personally to people is a bit of stretch. When we hear people say, “I just really feel like the LORD is saying to me...,” we think them a bit off especially when it seems to be a frequent occurrence for them. Then, there are these TV preachers. They're rambling right along and then all of a sudden they pause and look as if they heard something and then they say, “The LORD just told me...” and it's something really generic that's supposed to be something specific for somebody out there listening. If you are looking for a really good laugh along this line go to YouTube and watch The Farting Preacher videos. Priceless. But anyway, this way of speaking about the word makes it incredibly subjective and quite frankly people get abused by people who regularly “Get a word from the LORD.”

It's probably the case that for most of us when we think about hearing the word, we approach it more like, “Just tell me what it says in the Bible and I'll do it.” Yet, this approach reduces Scripture to being nothing more than a manual of moral truths for do-gooder's and presumes that God does not speak to us personally. This way of treating the Bible is fairly recent in the scheme of things and has come about with the onset of Deism in the last 300 years. Deism holds that God is the Great Watchmaker. He created the universe, wound it up, and let it tick and has had no involvement in it since, and...eventually it will wind down. Yet, one thing the Bible clearly and adamantly indicates is that God is directly involved in his Creation and in each of our lives. We each are part of God's purposes for his Creation. I remember reading somewhere and I couldn't find it in the Bible so it must have been a teaching the Rabbi's had that God created us with two holes in our heads meaning two ears so that we can hear him when he speaks. So, please do not underestimate the importance the Bible places on hearing God personally. You, we've, been created for that.

But anyway, I guess the question we really need to ask is how does God speak? How does God speak so that we may hear? I will confess my insanity here. In order for me to come to Canada to be the minister of this congregation God spoke to me an audible word. God showed me a vision of what this church looked like. And, God made verses in the Bible stick out to me specifically about this church. Speaking more generally, there have been times as I've told you before when I have had the experience of “It was as if God said to me, ‘Look at where I've brought you.’” Then, there's the countless number of times when in my daily Bible readings verses have stuck out to me that addressed me in a very specific manner. There have been times when I've actually had the opportunity to sit in church that God has spoken to me through the sermon or a hymn. There have also been times when something as weird as a hawk showing up at a moment that was more than coincidental seemed to me to be God speaking to me. God speaks. The German theologian Karl Barth said, “God may speak to us through Russian Communism, a flute concerto, a blossoming shrub, or a dead dog. We do well to listen to Him if He really does. . . . God may speak to us through a pagan or an atheist, and thus give us to understand that the boundary between the Church and the secular world can still take at any time a different course from that which we think we discern.” (CD I/1, 55) I'm not going to unpack that one for you other than to say that if God so desires, and he does, he can even speak to us by means of a dead dog.

And, let's set the record straight here. Because I am a minister God does not deal differently with me than he does with each of you. Since each of us is indwelt with the Holy Spirit who opens our ears to hear, God will speak and it does us well to give him opportunity. I think, heck I know, that for the most part our problem with hearing God speak is in our not giving ourselves opportunity to hear. For the most part we are like the proverbial redneck husband sitting in his recliner in his underwear and T-shirt watching TV drinking beer and eating the fried chicken his wife has just dutifully and possibly lovingly made for him all the while pretending to listen while his wife shares the details of her day. He's got a good wife. He might actually love her. But, he's got a heck of a way of showing it. We have a really good God who loves

us at the price of giving his life for and too us. We might actually love God. Yet truly, we've got a heck of a way of showing it when it comes to listening for God to speak. Nevertheless, speaking from my own experience God does and will speak specifically and personally to us particularly when we are at a low point or in the midst of crisis, when we are in need of being turned around, when we need guidance. God has not hung us out to walk through life on our own hoping we get it right. Our God loves us. Our God is faithful. Therefore, he speaks and he speaks lovingly to us that which is best for us. Even if it is "Repent or burn in the fires of hell" he speaks in love that which is best for us. Therefore, his word is nothing to fear, but rather the thing upon which we should place our hope.

Anyway, in our three passages today we see three people who have heard God speak. Isaiah came into the presence of the LORD God and became profoundly aware of his own filthy mouth as well as that of his people. Yet, God called him, cleansed him, and gave him words to say to his people; words hard to hear. Peter and the others listened to Jesus teach and then more specifically they did what he told them to do with respect to their fishing. (More than any other story in the gospels about Jesus this one really ticks me off. All those times, shoot every time, I went fishing in the rivers of Pocahontas County, WV and didn't catch anything, why didn't Jesus tell me where to cast?) They brought in a heck of a catch which assured them that Jesus was the one to follow. Yet, Peter, like Isaiah, realized he was not right with God and did not deserve the call that God was placing on his life. Lastly, Paul recounts how the Lord appeared to him as to one untimely born. Actually, the Greek in that phrase means like an aborted foetus. Paul too became aware of his unworthiness to receive the call Jesus had given to him because he persecuted the church. Indeed, he was a murderer. Yet, God in great love and faithful called him.

When God speaks the word comes with an overwhelming sense of the steadfast love and faithfulness of God which we know we do not deserve. Yet, in his steadfast love and faithfulness, by his grace God speaks to us words of life, indeed, the Word of life, Jesus Christ, given personally for and to us. God loves us and speaks to us. That's humbling. We do well to listen. We do well to follow. Amen.