

**Moravian Church in America  
2006 Southern Province Synod  
April 19-23, 2006**

**Listen Hear Serve**

**Opening Worship**

Message: 1 Samuel 3:1-10

By Angelene Swart

**Speak Lord Your Servant is Listening**

Moravians have a unique tradition of listening to the Word of God during Passion Week. This Easter was indeed a wonderful and blessed listening experience for me. Although we listen to the reading of the passion of Christ year after year, it always stirs the human soul to listen again and again. For me to be in a different surrounding made me much more conscious to listen more attentively, more compassionately, as I may never have this opportunity again, and that God may speak to me in a very new and particular way.

Maundy Thursday listening during communion: “This is my body, this is my blood;” Good Friday in the silence of the sanctuary listening to the reading of the crucifixion; attending a Tenebrae service and experiencing the darkness slowly overcoming one and again the silence, then the words of the choir and congregation pleading: “Jesus remember me.” The Easter Sunrise service — so many beautiful sounds to listen to: “The Lord is risen, the Lord is risen indeed!” Brass bands, hymns, birds chirping — but also the screeching sounds of sirens – police, ambulance – the reality of life. Dear Sisters and Brothers, during this Easter I found myself in a situation conducive to listening to the Lord.

Samuel, the young man, found himself in the temple of the Lord ministering before the Lord. He dwelt in the sanctuary because he was dedicated to the Lord by his dear mother Hannah.

Was this temple conducive to listening? The temple in Shiloh was in grave danger. The situation was reflected in the figure of the old, powerless and almost totally blind Priest Eli. Although Eli the Priest was always in the presence of the Most Holy Ark, God’s nearness, holiness, presence was not felt. Eli showed no desire, no drive, no vision for God’s revelation to the people. He dragged himself along, falling over his own feet as

he performed the temple duties. He showed no intention of openly listening to God and in those days the word of God was rare (3:1).

During the night, when some of the sounds had subsided, in a comparatively calm and peaceful atmosphere, God decided to speak. The people of God were going through a spiritually dry season. They needed to hear the voice of God. Who would listen and hear the voice of God? Samuel, whose nature was entirely different from that of Eli and his sons because of his desire to serve the Lord, and who was spiritually prepared for service, was at the place where God wanted him to be and ready to listen.

During that night, while Samuel was lying down in the temple, the Lord called him by name. Samuel was awake, listening. When Samuel heard the voice of the Lord he was immediately ready to respond. “Here I am,” although he mistook the voice of the invisible God for the voice of the visible Eli. His reaction shows that he was an obedient servant. His submission to a human will and authority was an element of his training. He was not going to hesitate if there is a need or a service to be performed.

After being called three times and running to the Priest every time, Eli realized what was happening and instructed Samuel what to say, namely, “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.”

Surely Samuel must have been surprised, scared, anxious, with many thoughts crossing his mind, becoming conscious of the presence of the majestic God. When he heard the voice again, “Samuel, Samuel,” his reply was a loud and clear testimony of his unconditional devotion to God. “Speak Lord for your servant is listening.” Speak Lord--humble subjection. He subjects himself to the will, wish, desire of the Lord. He opens himself, gives himself completely. Your Servant—shows his dependence and trust in God, his willingness to be a servant, a worker. Is Listening—shows active, unconditional obedience to the call of God. Remember the watchword of this day: “I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart.” Psalm 40:8

Like Samuel, is it also your desire as the synod of the Southern Province of the Moravian Church in America to say, “Speak Lord. We, your servants, are listening. Your church is listening.” Will this synod be conducive to listening? Are we humbly subjecting ourselves in complete obedience to the wishes and desires of the Lord for such

a time like this in the history of our church and her witness? Are we ready to listen? Are we willing to accept the message? Whatever the consequences?

Samuel became an attested prophet of God, a co-worker with God to realize the reign of God in a specific point and time in the history of God's people. God's mission always takes place in a particular social, economic, political, cultural and religious context.

The synod of the Southern Province of the Moravian Church in America gathers in a context very different, but perhaps we find some similarities to that of Samuel.

We live in a very fast changing world. Amid all the voices in the world, and in your particular world, you wish to listen and to hear the voice of God in order for you to discern where and how you should serve, act, transform, reconcile, empower.

Listening is indeed an art, a skill, and a discipline. One needs self-control to be able to be silent and to listen. It is an art to keep down our own needs and concentrate on the voice of the other in a spirit of humility, as the young Samuel experienced.

Hearing becomes listening only when we pay attention to what the other is saying. It is said that we think four times as fast as the average person speaks. It is therefore a God-given gift to say, "Speak, my sister, my brother, your servant is listening to you. I am hearing your need."

You are requested to listen to reports in groups, committees, plenary discussions and to hear the voice of God. Sometimes it will be clear and loud, sometimes soft and timid. Sometimes you will hear no voice of God at all! We will all be listening and hearing different voices, like Samuel who mistook the voice of the Lord at first. It is bound to happen also to us.

The church is called to listen carefully and intentionally to voices inside and outside of the church. Will we be able to hear the voice of the voiceless? The voice of the unseen? The voices not named in our reports and resolutions? The voices between the lines, the voices behind the words? The cries of the poor, oppressed, women, youth, disabled, minorities, excluded, marginalized? the sighs of those suffering from the effects of globalization, consumerism, individualism, unequal economics? the groans of those dying of HIV/AIDS, TB and malaria? the agony of those that must endure violence

caused by war, conflict? the cries of those dehumanized by rape, abuse, prostitution? the pain of our colleagues? the moans and groans of congregations?

Especially after Easter we have to listen to the cries of the wounded world like the wounded Christ on the cross: “My God, My God why hast thou forsaken us? why hast thou not listened?”

Many of us do not want to listen to the cries of a wounded world or person. We block out the cries that will interfere with the comforts of our world and thought. We are prejudiced about certain cries and then listen defensively and always ready to counter attack. “Am I my brother’s/sister’s keeper?”

Dear Sister/Brother, we are compelled to listen to the cries of the wounded world. Serving God begins by listening to the experiences between God and humanity. If one gives answers before he hears, it is his folly and shame.

As Christians, as a church, we are challenged to live out our faith in a world that is full of cries. This is possible if we listen, hear and respond. Remember the New Testament watchword for this day: “Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ” Galatians 6:12.

There are also the sounds of joy, peace, compassion, love, and thankfulness. Let us not forget to listen to the positive voices, the encouraging voices, the voices of the movers and shakers. The voices of those that make things happen in our Province. Let us bring those voices also to the fore. It is therefore applicable for us all to have the constant prayer on our lips namely, “Speak Lord,” and the constant vow to God, “your servant listens.”

May this prayer and vow be our unconditional devotion to our Lord God as we concentrate on His voice in a spirit of humility. God is waiting on us to listen to Him. Isaiah 51: 1,6,7,9

My prayer is that God will speak to His church gathered here, and that we, His servants, will receive a clear mandate and commission as we declare

Speak Lord your servants are listening!