

August 11, 2018 – 1 Samuel 3:1-12

“It Is Bittersweet ... to be called out in the darkness, when the silence is broken.”

Those who have experienced the arrival of a newborn in their home know exactly how long it's been since they last slept through the night. Every few hours those tiny lungs and vocal cords get exercised. We wake up, stumble in the dark and fumble around for a diaper or a bottle. Then, back to sleep to start that cycle all over again.

It Is Bittersweet ... to be called out in the darkness, when the silence is broken. We just fell asleep when the cry informs us, we've got a job to do. Then there's the grumpiness. Whose turn is it to rock, bounce, walk or whatever it takes to get those tiny eyes to close. The first couple of weeks, or even months with a newborn can be brutal.

But as much as we dread the sounds of crying in the middle of the night, we have an important job to do. We hold that precious life in our arms to rock them, sing to them and quietly reassure them that we've got them. Those aren't just any sounds, they're really: *“Mama I need you.”* or *“Dada I trust you.”* And when they fall asleep in our arms, it's the greatest compliment they could possibly give us.

Yes, it can be bitter, but it's so, so sweet to be called out in the darkness, when the silence is broken.

That's kind of like what took place in our lesson from 1 Samuel. The roles are different. But there was darkness and there was silence. But God broke that silence when he called out in the night.

Before we move on, perhaps you've wondered why doesn't God do that today? Sometimes it seems like God is just too quiet. We think, if only God would speak to us ... to our neighbor, to our children, to our grandchildren ... folks who have taken a break or even wandered from the faith. If only God would break the silence; call them by name and speak to them directly, maybe they'd change. Maybe that would bring them back. Is God just too quiet?

But then again, we're pretty comfortable just the way things are! We like the idea of God calling out others. But when God's breaks the silence and confronts us ... well, that's when we'd prefer he'd stayed quiet. We're fine when God keeps his distance and silence. It can be a bittersweet thing to be called out in the darkness like that!

In the opening verse of 1 Samuel 3, it was silent: **“The Word of the Lord was rare in those days.”** God wasn't speaking to his people through visions, like he did during the time of Gideon, Samson and Deborah – the Judges of Israel. God wasn't calling out from a burning bush or from a cloud-covered mountain, like he did with Moses. No! God was silent. But they still had his written Word, words written and handed down by Moses. The Lord may have been silent, but he was still speaking loud and clear ... if only they'd listen.

Finally, in the middle of one night, the silence was broken. God called to Samuel, who just happened be in a sound sleep. God called to Samuel by name, out of the darkness.

It Is Bittersweet ... that God called to Samuel out of the darkness. At a time when God's Word was **“rare,”** here he speaks. That's sweet! God's got a job for this sleepy young man. His job wasn't to rock a baby, it was to spiritually care for and feed God's children the Word of God. He was to confront them with their sins, comfort them with God's forgiveness, talk to them and let them know God was with them. That's sweet! Samuel alone was given this special job. He took pride in his role. The Lord would break his silence, as Samuel would bring the Word of the Lord back to Israel. That's sweet!

Jesus Christ entered our world of sin, our world of darkness. Jesus, the Light of the world, exchanged the glory of heaven for the womb of a woman. He grew up in a backwoods town. Hung out with some shady characters, even calling some of them

by name to be his followers. He was captured and accused at night. On the cross, the S-O-N was shining even when the S-U-N was darkened. When he cried out: **“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”** It appears as though God the Father remained silent as his Son hung there.

That is until he prayed: **“Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they are doing.”** Through Jesus, God broke the silence. Through Jesus, God was calling sinners out of the darkness. When Jesus prayed: **“Father forgive them”** – he means you and me!

It can be a bittersweet thing to be called out in the darkness.

- Bitter ... because we’re responsible for the darkness of our sins.
- Bitter ... because of what Jesus gave up for you and me.
- Bitter ... because his death was undeserved.
- Bitter ... because he became the target of God’s wrath instead of us.
- Bitter ... because his death on the cross meant he went quiet, and his lifeless body would be placed in a cold dark tomb.

Yet it is also so, so sweet!

- Sweet ... because this was a job no one else could do.
- Sweet ... because **“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil.”** Why? Jesus’ personally safely passed through the valley of death, and so will we.
- Sweet ... because in Jesus’ death and resurrection, God displayed the greatest show of love ever.
- Sweet ... because in God the Son, God the Father holds us close, speaks to us, lets us know he’s here and will never leave us.

Oh, we’re tempted to crawl back into the darkness, to return to our old habits before we knew Christ. We’re tempted to drag along with us those sins of the past, and their guilt and their shame. They’re like a dark cloud hovering over us.

But, in Baptism, we’ve been called out of the darkness! We have an identity – I’m a child of God. No matter where we’ve been or what we’ve done, God calls us in patient love to leave our dark past behind us. God calls us by name out of the darkness, and he has a job for us — to be his spokespersons in our home, our neighborhood, our community and our workplace.

How can we avoid the darkness and continue to walk as children of Light? Get into God’s Word and stay in the Word. God’s spoken Word was rare at Samuel’s time, but his written Word was still there.

Is the Word of the Lord *“rare”* in your lives? God isn’t silent. He’s speaks to you today, right now ... through the pages of Scripture, in our worship service, through this message ... and continues to speak to you in your devotions and Bible studies, through your fellowship WITH believers and your encouragement FROM believers.

It’s not a matter of whether God is speaking to us or not. It’s a matter of whether we’re listening. And when we’re not listening, that’s when the darkness creeps back in.

It’s easy to allow things other than the One Thing Needed to have priority in our lives. It Is Bittersweet to be called out in the darkness – to wake us from our slumber, but the rewards are so, so sweet.

So, my prayer for you, for me, for our whole congregation is that we listen to and hear the voice of the Lord calling out to us.

- Think about a Bible passage while waiting in the check-out line.
- Sign up for daily E-Devotions from the WELS or Time of Grace.
- Listen to Christian podcasts.
- Grab a devotional book.
- Dedicate the 8:30 time slot on Sunday morning or 6:30 time slot on Monday night for Bible study starting in September.

- Invite someone to come with you if you're already attending one of those or the women's or men's Bible studies.

Whatever you do, don't let the Word of the Lord become "**rare**" in your life. Listen to the voice of the Lord who calls out to you. Answer his call ... by singing our next hymn on p.7!