

“The boy Samuel ministered before the Lord under Eli. In those days the word of the Lord was rare; there were not many visions.” — 1 Samuel 3:1 NIV

A friend gave up social media (Facebook, etc) for Lent either last year or the year before. Now they don't post a lot when they are on line but I missed them. I longed for Lent to be over so that I could catch up again with what was happening and their insights into the things of the world. I had grown accustomed to seeing their posts and notes. The 40 days of silence seemed too long - finally Easter came and they broke their social media silence. It was good to hear from them again. As I thought about this recently (wondering if they were going to do the same this Lent), I began to wonder about the “word of the Lord.” What happens when God seems silent? Can you imagine what the centuries between the last of the prophets and the coming of John the Baptist must have been like for the those trying to keep the faith. There were no words and visions from God. They were less frequent than in those days than in the days of Samuel. At least in Samuel's day some could remember God's words and visions. But, centuries of silence. Centuries of waiting for a “word from the Lord”.

I recall Dr. Harold Ockenga sharing with us his prayer journal. There was one prayer request that he had been praying for 37 years. There was still no answer, or at least the answer he was expecting. However, he would continue to pray the prayer request with the assurance that one day God would break the silence and answer. He encouraged those present not to grow weary in prayer - not to give up on God because God does not give up on us.

What do we do with the silence of God? When we have prayed with faith and God seems not to hear. 1 John 5:14 reminds us that God does hear us when we pray, “And this is the boldness we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us” (NRSV). What is according to his will? Jesus in the Garden prayed that if it was possible the cup would pass from him - and then added, “yet, not what I want, but what you want” (Mark 14:36 NRSV). Jesus was willing to submit to the will of God - the road before him was not the one he wanted at that moment, but it was the one God wanted him to take. It was for us that Jesus was willing to take the road God put before him.

Is God silent or do we just not like the answer? Most of us never like to hear the word “No”. It is not what we want to hear. We want a yes to all our prayers, all our hopes and dreams. And yet, sometimes we need hear a “No” or a “not at this time”. It does not mean that God did not or God does not hear but that at least for now, the answer is not the one we are praying for. I remembered a poem by an unknown author — Read again the poem:

I Asked God

I asked God for all things that I might enjoy life...
 God said, "Rather, I will give you life so that you may enjoy all things."
 I asked God to give me wisdom...
 God said, "Rather, I will give you problems to solve so you may become wise."
 I asked God to give me strength...
 God said, "Rather, I will give you difficulties to make you strong."
 I asked God to give me courage...
 God said, "Rather, I will give you danger to overcome."
 I asked God to give me prosperity...
 God said, "Rather, I will reward you with the fruits of your labor."
 I asked God to take away my pain...
 God said, "Rather, It is not for me to take it away, but for you to give it up."
 I asked God to spare me pain...
 God said, "Rather, Suffering draws you apart from worldly cares and draws you closer to me."
 I asked God to make my handicapped child whole...
 God said, "Rather, the child's spirit is whole, and it's body is only temporary."
 I asked God to grant me patience...
 God said, "Rather, patience isn't granted, it's learned through tribulation."
 I asked God to give me happiness...
 God said, "Rather, I give you blessings. Happiness is up to you."
 I asked God to give me favors...
 God said, "Rather, I will give you choices."
 I asked God to make my spirit grow...
 God said, "Rather, your faith will give you growth, and I will prune you to make you fruitful."
 I asked God to give me love...
 God said, "Rather, I will send to you those in need for you to give your love to."
 I asked God to help me love others, as much as He loves me...
 God said, "Now you understand! Your love will shine through as you fulfill My Law."