1 Samuel 3:1b In those days the word of the Lord was rare;

Samuel lived during the period of the Old Testament judges. To get a handle on what that means then just be aware that the period of the Judges started with the death of Joshua, the successor to Moses. Joshua died around 1375 bc. For the next 325 years God’s people would be ruled by the Judges, people that God raised up to bring his judgment and to try and get the people back to the Lord. You, I am sure, know the names of a few of those judges: Deborah, Gideon and Samson.

Please note that the history of Samuel starts in 1105 bc which is about 80 years or so before the birth of Samson, who is the last of the judges. Understand that during this period, the people of God were to be a “theocracy.” They were to be ruled by God. God had established his priesthood, including the High Priest with his Urim and Thumim, the way the High Priest was to discern and find the will of God. Mind you, they had the Law of God. They knew what God said was right and wrong. And still at the time of Samuel you find a statement like the one we just read: **In those days the word of the Lord was rare.”**

Why? Why was the Word of the Lord rare? Was God at fault? Did God fail to lay out his desire and ways before this people of God? Had God failed to make himself clear? The answer to all of those questions is “No.” It is not God who is at fault. God gave these people everything necessary, every way necessary to live in accord with his will AND God even gave them a way to inquire of Him and what was right. But the people didn’t ask. The people didn’t work to follow God. Worse yet, this problem existed because the religious rulers had even determined that they knew better than God. So the truth of God’s word was neglected. The purpose of the word of God and the Law of God was altered in the minds of the people in order to serve their desires rather than the Lord’s. This was not a people of true faith, a people who followed and served the Lord. It was a people that had become ungodly. They claimed to follow the Lord, but the end result of all of this is what our little verse says: **In those days the word of the Lord was rare.**

I have to tell you those words really stuck out at me when I was studying this text to prepare for this sermon. What this text said and what our Bible class verses said all conspired that I should focus on this verse. Focus on it because in truth, I think that this verse is the very epitome of the world’s problem today. Yes, today, it could be said, **“the word of the Lord was rare.”** Let’s you and I contemplate the wonder of this little verse under the theme: **THE WORD OF THE LORD.**

Please recall for yourselves the wonderful history of Samuel. Sam’s mother had the desire for children and wasn’t having any luck. Every chance she got, she took her desire to the Lord and although she was considered barren, she continued to take her desire to the Lord. Do you remember how the High Priest Eli had seen Sam’s mother praying silently and accused her of being drunk? When he learned the truth of her life and heart Eli blessed her. It is shortly after that that Samuel is born!

And what a faithful Mom. Even though Samuel was her firstborn, when Samuel was weaned, about 2 or 3 years old, this woman took Samuel to the Tabernacle and from that point on Samuel lived there and learned to be a servant of the Lord. We know his Mom was blessed with more children by the Lord because of her faithfulness in giving Samuel to the service of the Lord. And then, perhaps when Samuel was around 12 years old, the events of our text occur, and the Lord, the Word of the Lord is revealed to Samuel.

But you heard the story of how God called Samuel and Samuel kept going to Eli. That’s because the Word of the Lord was rare. Why was the Word of the Lord rare? Evidently Eli, the High Priest, thought more of his family than of God’s Word and what was right. Eli, had two sons, and almost from the time those sons are mentioned in Scripture it is made clear that they are boys who were wicked to the core. Tell me, how does a child grow up in the home of the High Priest and end up so thoroughly wicked? Because that house was not living with the attitude of God’s Word. Call it hypocrisy, call it weak faith on Eli’s part but recognize that the problem here was that while Law of God was heard, evidently it was not believed and lived. In truth, among the people of Israel, this was a pretty common thing. God’s Law was heard but it was not believed and was not lived. And I want you to contemplate that God had to raise up Samuel because evidently none of the religious leaders were what the Lord was looking for. Yep, the Word of the Lord was rare.

I want you to know that because of the grace and love of God Samuel grew up and became a great prophet of the Lord. Under the direction of Samuel, many people of Israel were brought back to faith and the wonder of God. And just so you do know, Eli and his wicked sons would eventually be struck down for their failure to follow so that the office of the High Priest was given to another family. The instrument that God used to bring about his way and his Word to the people again…was Samuel!

Did you ever wonder who it was that Samuel spoke to? I know, the obvious answer is “God,” generally we would mean “God the Father.” But is that right? Why is this voice, this Lord referred to as, “The Word of the Lord?” Perhaps we can get a grip on this just by letting Scripture help. Recall if you would the words of John 1:1ff. **“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning. 3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. 4 In him was life, and that life was the light of men. 5 The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it…9 The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world. 10 He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. 11 He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. 12 Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God-- 13 children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. 14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.**

Pastor, do you mean to tell us that you think Jesus, the Word was the one guiding Samuel? The answer I would give is, “Yes!” The Word, Jesus, guided Samuel in truth, in wisdom, in faith and life. That’s why Samuel was such a powerful force and such a wonderful instrument of the Lord, because “The Word,” Jesus, was with him in every way. Samuel heard and lived the Word. Samuel believed the Word, which if you go back to the Gospel of John, you grasp was God’s desire and will. How well those words fit with Samuel’s life when it says, **“children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.”** God raised up Samuel to serve him. God blessed Samuel and guided him. God gave Samuel every needed gift that would serve to the glory and honor of salvation.

You recognize that you and I have the very same gift? We have the Word of God, the truth and wonder of Jesus and our eternal salvation. We have the Word that guides, calls, strengthens and keeps us in the true faith. We have the Word of Jesus that Jesus tells us will bring all the gifts of the Holy Spirit that our faith might be sure and confident in every way. We have the Word that makes us servants and children of God because that Word reveals God’s great love and grace to us. But will it be said of us, **“In those days, the Word of the Lord was rare?”**

Are we going to hear the Word and not believe? Are we going to hear and not live the way God desires of us? Are we going to decide God’s Word, the Bible, that has the power and marvel of Jesus behind every jot and tittle, is nothing more than the imaginations of men? Are we going to cause the Word of the Lord to be rare in our lives or are we going to be like Samuel and say, **“Speak, for your servant is listening!”**

I wonder about that? Go back and look at our Epistle reading found in 1 Co. 6:12-20. Do you realize that God tells us in those words not to let anything of this world become our master? Food, drink, drugs, alcohol, passions, desires, gambling…this is a pretty extensive list, for what things of this world can’t our lives get totally wrapped up and lost in? God says, **“But I will not be mastered by anything.”** And please notice the dire warning that God gives in regard to sexuality. **“Flee from sexual immorality,”** is the point blank warning…and yet our world does absolutely the opposite. Are you with the Word or are you with the world?

Or consider our Gospel lesson today, John 1:43-51. Here is Jesus calling Philip and Nathanael to his service. They heard that call of the Word and they followed. And yet, that very same call has been given to each of us. Every Lutheran sitting here learned the truth of God in Catechism class. Every one of you who was confirmed declared that you would rather die than fall away from the Lord or despise his gifts of the Gospel in Word and Sacrament. Have you kept that Word in you? Have you made full use of blessings and benefits of God’s Word? Or is the word of God rare in your life?

Here is what I will tell you of the Word. The Word has the power and marvel of Jesus our Savior behind it because it is the complete and true revelation of God through and in Jesus. Because the Bible is the Word with the power of Jesus behind it, we don’t get to pick and choose what we want to believe or follow. We are to believe it all. To deny any part of the Word is to deny the very Savior God has given you. Note that your use of the Word will have a direct bearing on your faith and your life. Lots of Word correctly, lots of faith and certainty of God’s grace. Notice how I put that. Remember Eli had a life basically surrounded by the Word of God but he didn’t listen and follow. The same is true for us. It is not just that you hear the Word on a regular basis (you know, *“but hear and learn it gladly, everyday!”)* it is also about whether you have the attitude to follow and live it or do you just figure that God will have to accept the way you want it? How did that go for Eli and his sons? How did that go for Judas? How did that go for any who walked away from Jesus and refused to hear and believe? Are you with the Word or with the world?

Dear people, God has given us the Word, Jesus, to be our hope, guide, truth, life and light in everything. The Father and Son conspired together to pay for our sins and grant us eternal life and salvation by his death on the cross and his resurrection from the dead. The Father and the Son have sent us the Holy Spirit, who works through the Word and sacraments for our faith and life. We have all things in the grace and wonder of our God, revealed in his Word. Let us hear and believe. Let us hear and live to the glory and honor of our Lord. Let us have the Word as the heart of our lives no matter what. May it never be said of us, “Them, yeah, the Word of the Lord was rare there!” Hear, believe and live with the Word. Amen.