

Hush

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Soren Kierkegaard, the Danish philosopher of 160 years ago, wrote this sentence: "If I could prescribe just one remedy for the all the ills of the modern world, I would prescribe silence." Over 160 years ago he wrote those words. Without even the noise of the telephone, the television, the radio, the YouTube, the iTunes, the podcast, the MP3, the on demand video, the car horn, the TV talking heads -- the great thinker pondered the mid-19th century world and said, "If I could prescribe just one remedy for the all the ills of the modern world, I would prescribe silence."

I have a hunch that most of us would offer to Kierkegaard's statement a nod of quiet assent. We live in a noisy world. And it seems to get noisier and noisier. And it's not just the noise that happens around us -- it's the noise that happens because of us. We are, whether we like it or not, noisemakers. Because we are the ones who turn on the TV's and radios and smart phones and podcasts and you tubes we are responsible, aren't we, for the noise. We have announcements before shows and events that say, please remember to turn off your noisemakers. We even now have ear buds -- tiny little headphones so that we don't have to listen to anyone else's noise, just our own. Our own noise.

And yet strangely at the same time I think we know deep down that the moments of greatest gravity in life happen with the sound turned off. Without benefit of soundtrack or talking heads or blah, blah, blah -- it is in the quiet that the sacred appears and all that really matters drowns out all that really doesn't matter. A mother holding her newborn baby. A long walk in an empty forest. Lovers holding hands and staring wordlessly. A proud and speechless father watching his child

perform with tears rolling down his cheeks. An empty cathedral with spectrums of light streaming from stained glass windows. A silent prayer on behalf of a friend in danger. An old man sitting beside the hospice bed of his one and only love. No noise, just silence.

A couple weeks ago I went to a hockey game. The Tampa Bay Lightning – professional hockey team. Now when you go to a professional sports event what you soon discover is that there is no such thing as silence. Every moment is filled with sound. Never is there a moment when the powers that be will dare to leave you alone with your thoughts. As soon as play stops onto the amplifiers comes some obnoxious music, some unnecessary announcement, some pounding beat to make it impossible to sit quietly or to talk. Every moment filled with sound. In between periods the same thing. Music blaring every second. At one point between two of the periods there came the announcement of one of these corny and distracting games they play on the ice with people chosen from the crowd. Some sort of silly competition to distract us even further. And in this instance they brought out onto the ice a brother and sister. The brother around 14, the sister around 12. And the competition was to see who could shoot the most pucks into the net from center ice. One shooting toward one net, the other to the other net – at the same time. So they lined the brother and sister up facing away from each other with sticks in hands and pucks before them – and on the count of 3, the announcer blared, you start. The crowd is cheering. Ready, he said, One ---- Two ---- and then he said, “STOP!!!!” And all of a sudden silence. “TURN AROUND,” he said. And the brother and sister turned around and in this pregnant pause what they could see forty feet away standing on the ice was their Air Force father home from Afghanistan. And the girl she stares in wonder. And she starts to run. And the ice makes the run much slower than she can stand. And she slips and she slides and she buries her sobbing face into her father’s chest. And she holds on for dear life. And the boy right behind, holds on for dear life. All without benefit of sound.

Let all mortal flesh keep silence, is what we just sang. And we know it is our best chance for the sacred to appear. Our best chance to see what really matters. And to hear, perhaps, the word of God. The unfiltered word of God. The undistracted word of God. The particular word of God

meant particularly for you and for me. In the silence God has our attention – to say something meant only for us.

So it was for the prophet Elijah. Elijah is afraid and he is on the run from the wicked Queen Jezebel who is trying to root the prophets out of Israel. And Elijah goes and hides himself in a cave – because he doesn't know what else to do. And God beckons him from the cave – and tells Elijah that he shall soon pass before him. And so what follows first is the sound and fury of a great wind cracking rocks and splitting cliffs – but the Lord is not in the wind. And then the sound and shake of an earthquake, but the Lord is not in the earthquake. And then a fire, but the Lord is not in the fire. And then after the fire comes sheer silence. Sheer silence, we're told. And it is in the sheer silence that Elijah hears a question – "What are you doing here, Elijah?" Was it the question he most needed to hear and was it the silence that allowed him to hear it? The moments of greatest gravity happen with the sound turned off.

So in our readings this morning from Matthew 16 and 17 we find Jesus at an important moment in his ministry. He is preparing to make his journey to Jerusalem and to confront face to face the religious leaders of the day and to accomplish his mission of sacrifice. But before setting his face toward Jerusalem he turns to his disciples and in a quiet moment asks them a simple question, maybe the question they most needed to hear: Who do you say that I am? We don't know how long it took for any of them to come up with an answer – maybe a moment or maybe a pregnant pause – but finally it is Simon who speaks up and out of the silence gives his answer – "You are the Christ, the son of the Living God." Ten words. Ten simple words that were enough to change a life, not to mention a world. "You are the Christ, the son of the Living God." It's as much as Peter needed to say.

And so with this wonderful confession Jesus begins to teach the disciples what it means to be Messiah. And what it means to be Messiah is to take a certain course, to travel a certain path – and the direction that Jesus sets for himself is the journey to the cross. To be Messiah is to go to the cross. To go to Jerusalem, suffer at the hand of the leaders, and die on a cross. Now not liking what he is hearing from the one he has just called Messiah – Peter feels that it is his duty to keep talking. Fill the

silence. Interrupt the program. “Excuse me, I think you know what you’re doing. I think you need a little help. I think you need a little noise. I think you need the benefit of my agenda. Because, you see, that’s not what Messiahs do.” And Jesus says, “Hush. You’re interrupting. Messiah is on his way to Jerusalem and let all mortal flesh keep silence. What’s happening is too sacred for you to add commentary. Be still and know that I am God.”

So six days later, Jesus invites Peter and James and John up a mountain and there, as we heard, something very mysterious takes place where Jesus is transfigured and appears before these three disciples along with the two great prophets of Israel, Moses and Elijah. And the three great prophets are in a conversation. And what do you do when three great prophets are in conversation? You might want to listen. You might want to keep silence. You might want to take in the moment. Not our friend Peter. “Excuse me. Ah, excuse me. Say I have a great idea, let me build each of you a little house, put down stakes, settle here with this nice view, and we can call this the end of the road. Let’s forget about the MapQuest to the cross – and let’s stay up here in the glory.” And what Peter doesn’t know is that he’s interrupting. He is filling the moment with his own speech. He is interrupting the voice of the holy. “While he was still speaking,” Matthew tells us, “while he was still trying to interrupt – the voice of the Father from above said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased, Listen to him!!”

Listen, Peter, listen. Hush.

Did you feel the awkwardness of that silence? 10 seconds of silence. 10 seconds of space I did not fill. For some of you it woke you up. For some it made you wonder. For some it made you worry if I had lost my place. But if anything, silence makes us pay attention and at the very least, makes us wonder. Without silence – maybe there is no wonder.

Don’t you wonder if one of the reasons we have such trouble with silence – is that somewhere in the silence there may be a question? A question maybe we don’t want to hear? Don’t you wonder that the reason Peter is so quick to fill the silence beyond Jesus’ words – that the reason Peter

is so eager to put in his 2 cents worth – is that to leave the silence is to have to wonder what will I do with what I have just heard – what will I do with these words? Will I take them at face value? It's so hard to learn that. So when Jesus later tells Peter that on the eve of his death, Peter will deny Jesus three times. Peter just can't leave it alone, just can't confront the possibility, just can't allow the truth of those words to sink in – "I will never deny you!!"

This is my son, listen to him. Listen. Listen. Listen.

"Be still, and know that I am God," the psalmist says. For in the stillness comes the space to see and hear and behold the works and words of the Lord. What will Jesus' words ask us in the silence?

If you want to become my follower, deny yourself and take up your cross and follow me.

If you want to save your life – surrender it.

What does it profit a person to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?

Isn't it strange how eager we are to put up some defense to those words? Some diversion from those questions? Strange, of course, because aren't we the ones who believe that this Messiah has come that we might have life and have it abundantly?

Remember that prodigal son who limps his way home and sees the Father running to him – but the boy's been practicing his speech? He's got words to speak into the silence of his father's galloping approach and smothering embrace. "Oh no," the boy says, "let me explain. Let me tell you how it really is. Let me give you all the reasons for why you shouldn't be doing what you are doing – running and embracing. Let me add a soundtrack to this. And the father says, Hush. Hush.

Don't you wonder if with all the sound, all the chatter, all the static, all the ear bud music, all the silly competition, all the compulsion to set our own direction and fill the void with the sound of our own voices – if what we've done with all the distraction is to keep ourselves from the One who wants

us in his embrace. The One who wants to save our lives. Not unlike the drowning man who kicks and flails at his rescuer.

So maybe with these pledge cards we are about to offer and dedicate – there is in them a little surrender. A little bit of letting go. A moment of pause to let God hold on. And this is good. But dare we let that pause continue. Dare we resist the temptation to drop our card and make our way to brunch and be back to our chatter? And not to wonder. Not to let there be some silence sometime today to let some question be asked? To let the Christ speak into the silence and to ask us what he will ask us about what we've done and what there is still left to do. To allow him the space to appear with his arms outstretched to embrace us and to lead us. Guide me, O Thy Great Jehovah. Lead on. That we might follow. Take up our cross and quietly follow. That in the face of all the ills of this modern world – we might prescribe if only for ourselves a little silence.