

1 Kings 19:9-13

Feb. 28, 2021

Mark 1:35; 6:30-34

Silence & Solitude

Introduction

This past week, in our Lent Experience, we were challenged to fast ... fast from food or entertainment, or digital devices ... whatever distracts us from our Creator. How'd you do with fasting? Were you able to do it and did you give more time to prayer?

This week we're challenged to enter into God's presence through silence and solitude. Do you think you can find an hour, a half hour, even a few minutes of silence and solitude in your week? Can you stay focused on God for that time?

Yeah, me too ... it's a challenge, though I'm an introvert and so generally enjoy being alone. But staying focused on God to the point of hearing His voice? I confess I haven't been all that successful at doing so regularly. Nonetheless, if we want to find God's direction for our lives and for our families, we'll need to get close enough to God to discern His will. Oh yes, the Scriptures are a great guide and if you follow a plan of living that adheres to the Bible, you'll find yourself walking with the Lord. Yet the Bible also gives us plenty of notices about the importance of silence and solitude before the Lord.

I heard of one pastor who surveyed his congregation, asking what part of the worship service they liked best. Some said the music, the hymns, the choir, others the sermon, and some the prayer time. One man, however, said he liked best the prelude. When the pastor asked him why he replied that his whole week was full, busy, and quite intense, but when he sat down in the Sanctuary and the prelude began, it was the one time all week he could relax, be quiet, and be with God.

The State of Being Busy

Most of us are pretty busy in our day to day living. To stop and do nothing for even a few moments each week may seem like a waste of time. I'm very task-oriented and have difficulty sitting still if there is a task on my list still to be completed. Most of us feel like we need to be active every minute of the day. We are a people and a society in which being busy makes us feel like we are worthwhile.

A generation or two ago, the life of the family was going to be revolutionized by the automatic washing machine. Up until then, washing the family's laundry literally took an entire day. People referred to one day of their week as wash day. Then technology came through with the washing machine. What a time saver! So, what happened? Did we get more time to relax or spend with God? Nope, we filled our time with other things. The computer was the same way. It enables us to do more work in a lot less time. But do we get off work early? No. We simply do more work. Even if we are not talking about work, many families are stretched to the limit with activities going from school to all kinds of activities and outings.

Could it be we have confused busy-ness with being productive, successful, effective, and meaningful? Who are we trying to impress anyway?

The Silence of the Bible

You'd think we would have already understood the importance of silence and solitude, in order to hear God's voice. **The Scriptures are replete with examples and directions on silence before the Lord.** Eccl. 3:7 reminds us that there is *...a time to keep silence, and a time to speak...* Maybe you've heard that old adage, better to remain silent and appear the fool than to open your mouth and remove all doubt.

Seriously, though, the best time to be silent is in your time before God. **Psalm 37:7** reminds: ***Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him.*** **Psalm 46:10** says: ***Be still and know that I am God! I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted in the earth.*** The prophet Habakkuk said: ***...the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him! Hab. 2:20.***

Our OT reading this morning tells us pretty plainly how we may hear God. After Elijah saw and heard the roaring wind, the earthquake and fire, there came as a sound of "sheer silence." That's when the voice of the Almighty came to him.

Temptations

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil, Matt. 4:1. **As you get closer to the Lord you become more of a target for Satan.** His whole purpose is to keep you from returning to your true home and family in Christ. The devil wants to keep you in bondage to the ways of this fallen world. Every little distraction, each task on your "to do" list, will call you away from silence before God and keep you from hearing His voice. Another temptation will be to do all the talking. Isn't that what we usually do during prayer time? **We think that prayer is talking to God, giving God a list of things we want from Him.** "Heal me from my headache, make my car last another week, bring down the gas prices, do something about this pandemic, etc." Real prayer is spending time with God. It might involve asking for things. It might involve thanking God for things. It could simply be resting in the presence of God. Most of our prayers seek God's hand, rather than God's face.

Have you ever simply spent time with someone, and you are both just quiet ... not really saying anything ... just quietly being together? Perhaps with your spouse ... or holding your child ... or at the bedside of your sick parent. We need more of that time spent with God. Quiet time with God. We will rarely find God in the hectic moments in our lives. Mother Teresa once observed, "God rarely is found in the midst of noise and restlessness; instead, He is the friend of silence."

Practical Advice

With work and spouse and kids, and all the other demands on you, how are you supposed to find time for quiet with God? Maybe your life is such that you could cry like **Job (3:26), *I am not at ease, nor am I quiet; I have no rest; but trouble comes!*** If only I could get some quiet and solitude. Susanna Wesley (mother of John & Charles who founded Methodism) had 19 children, 10 of whom survived. She home-schooled them all. It is said that in her bustling household that she found quiet time to be with God each day. She would raise her apron over her head and announce to the children that her quiet time with God was commencing. They had been taught to leave her alone for this time.

Of the four Gospels, Mark's is probably most 21st Century-compatible. Mark gives the impression that everyone is always in a hurry – always busy. The word “immediately” appears over 50 times in Mark's Gospel. “And immediately the Holy Spirit sent him into the desert.... Immediately they left their nets.... “immediately and quickly the news spread about Jesus.” And yet there's this: *very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed, Mark 1:35.*

Even in His fast paced and very purposeful life *Jesus needed to retreat to a quiet, lonely place for reflection, meditation, prayer, and communion with God.* Isn't that true for us as well? It makes our busy lives worthwhile and bearable. More than bearable – times of being in solitude and quiet with God enable us to do the work we are called by Him to do.

So, when's a good time to find solitude and silence to be with God? Here's a clue: *At daybreak, Jesus went out to a solitary place, Luke 4:42.* Now, there's no biblical mandate that says you must have your time alone with God early in the AM. Some folks are just not morning people. You may be one of those people who says that you could be a morning person if it started around 10:00 or 11:00. I heard of a guy who does 10 sit ups every morning. That might not sound like much but there's only so many times you can hit the snooze button.

Nevertheless, early mornings are good because it's before your busy schedule kicks in. But *whatever time of day works for you, find it! It's all about seeking God.*

The author of our Lent Experience gives us some practical advice about our time of solitude and silence with God:

- Don't turn it into a reading time.
- Bring your journal to jot down thoughts and prayers ... but don't write a tome.
- Be honest to God and stay focused on God.
- Don't get too comfortable ... move around if need be.
- Listen!

Set a goal for the time you will remain silent in God's presence. Work your way to an hour.

There Is A Reason

Don't just do something ... sit there! *For God alone my soul waits in silence; from him comes my salvation... For God alone my soul waits in silence, for my hope is from him, Psalm 62:1&5.* Did you get that? *For God alone my soul waits in silence ... from him comes my salvation ... my hope is from him. Salvation and hope are reason enough to wait in silence before God.*

A fast paced and busy life is not unique to our age. In the Gospel of Luke there is a story of Jesus being hosted by sisters Martha and Mary (Luke 10:38-42). Martha is busy, focused on providing a meal and hospitality. Mary is content to be still and silent, sitting at the feet of the Lord. Martha complains to Jesus that her sister isn't helping her. Jesus says to Martha: *you are worried and upset about many things, but few things*

are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her, Luke 10:41-42.

And, so it is with us. Jesus is in the midst of our life, while we are worried and upset about many things. Our world is busy, our lives full. Wouldn't it be powerful if we were truly still and knew that He is the Lord? Wouldn't it be life-giving if we would, in the midst of work, family pressures, school-work, just turn off the television, the radio, turn off the cell phones and tablets, and simply pray? Being still and quiet from time to time is God's will for our lives. It is really essential that we rest from our work and find that solitary place of quiet. *... few things are needed—or indeed only one...*

Renewed on Purpose

I've heard some Christians say, "The devil never takes time off, why should we?" My answer: "We don't work for the devil!" **We need times** in our week **when we** slow down and **become still** **because it is vital for our souls.** So important is this principle, that God commanded it. *Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, Exodus 20:8-10.*

Psalm 23 tells us what that quiet rest is for: *...he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul...*

Yet, Jesus didn't go to that quiet and solitary place and stay there. He went there to recharge His spiritual batteries. Being there enables Him to then get up and move on to find other places to preach his message. **Our spiritual batteries also need recharging on a regular basis.** Don't neglect quiet time with God. When we are in tune with our Lord we can say "Amen" to end our prayers ... which means "so be it." The end of prayer is action.

There is a time to just sit there. Then there is a time to say to yourself, "don't just sit there, do something."

Let me close with this little story: Before refrigerators people used icehouses to preserve their food. Icehouses had thick walls, no windows, and a tightly fitted door. In winter when streams and lakes were frozen, large blocks of ice were cut, hauled to the icehouse and covered with sawdust. Often the ice would last well into the summer.

One time a man lost a valuable watch while working in an icehouse. He searched diligently for it, carefully raking through the sawdust, but didn't find it. His fellow workers also looked but their efforts proved futile. A small boy who heard about the fruitless search slipped into the icehouse during the noon hour and soon emerged with the watch. Amazed, the men asked him how he found it. "I closed the door," the boy replied, "and then I laid down in the sawdust and kept very still. Soon I heard the watch ticking."

With all the distractions cleared away, we can hear what we need to hear: the still, small voice of the Almighty. Make time to get alone with God. In silence you will be richly rewarded.

...he leads me beside still waters, he restores my soul...