

First Trinity Lutheran Church
Mark 6: 30-34, 53-56
July 22, 2012

Get Away from the Noise

Today I am aware of the tragic and violent shooting in Aurora Colorado and start of the International AIDS conference that begins here in Washington today. The medical promise of a cure for AIDS is very close but the infection rate continues to be very high especially right here in DC which means we have much work yet to do. These events remind me that we are surrounded by a symphony of noise each day. This symphony of our lives is composed of telephones, doorbells, dishwashers, lawn mowers, laundry buzzers, and car horns. They beep, bleep, buzz, bang, and boom at us until we think we'll go mad. Most of our homes aren't quiet. The volume seems to be set before dawn to well into the night. In my neighborhood one can hear the constant whirling of the outside AC compressors that seems to never go off. We've come to expect whirring gadgets, pulsating CD players, and babbling televisions. Now some of you maybe asking yourselves where is he going with all this, so stay with me for just a few minutes longer.

In *The Grinch that Stole Christmas*, Dr. Seuss spoke for a lot of us when he wrote: And then! Oh, the noise! Oh, the noise! Noise! Noise! Noise! That's one thing he hated the NOISE! NOISE! NOISE! NOISE! The sheer volume of noise, noise, noise does more to us than we realize. Noise keeps us focused on the superficial and unimportant. We try to convince ourselves that silence is just around the corner.

Several of us have been gathering here at First Trinity on Thursday Evenings to do something the noise in our lives. We have been reading the Rule of Benedict. Benedict was a Monk who started the Order of Saint Benedict back in the early 500, that is some 1500 years ago. In order to build the spirituality of the monks Benedict wrote the Rule, we now call the "Rule of Benedict." Part of our Thursday evening includes reading and discussing the rule along with 15-20 minutes silent prayer or centering prayer. Steve Brodd has so gently and skillfully led our group for the past two years during this time and we refer to him as our Abbot. Just before we

begin our time of silent prayer Steve reads this verse from Ps 46 “Be Still and Know that I am God.”

Every time I hear this verse “Be Still and Know that I am God” I realize that silence is not a part of our everyday lives. Most of us have a hard time being quiet, especially me. You come to the end of a long day. You’re by yourself. It’s a perfect time to be silent, to meditate on the day’s events—what was good, what wasn’t what you could have done differently, what you hope for tomorrow. So what do we usually do? We turn on the television.

Lucy is playing the outfield when a hit comes her way. The ball drops beside her, but Lucy doesn’t move to catch it. Charlie Brown rushes out to angrily ask why she didn’t catch the ball. He points out that she didn’t even have to take a step. All she needed to do was hold out her glove. Lucy answers simply, “I was having my quiet time.” We are more likely to have the emotions of Charlie Brown than the dedication of Lucy.

Silence is an option we usually ignore. We fill our days with activity. We idealize rustic settings, but when we finally go to the cabin in the woods, we’re tempted to take our radios so that if the silence gets to be too much we can get out of it. Maybe we’ve confused silence with loneliness and ended up leery of one of God’s best gifts. Silence is meant to help us live beneath the noise. Without solitude it’s virtually impossible to lead a life of faith. Our lives may brim with experiences, but sheer busyness pushes us away from life.

Silence is also more than the absence of noise. Silence can be the act of listening to God. Genuine solitude is an instrument by which God leads. “Be still and know that I am God” It may be difficult for us to learn how to turn down the volume, but if we work at it I believe that we will experience a holy silence that sustain and refresh us.

Jesus understood the need for silence. In today’s Gospel reading the disciples have returned from a mission trip. They’re tired and hungry, but they excitedly tell Jesus about everything they’ve done. Jesus can see they’re exhausted, so he tells them to find a quiet place to rest for a

while. The disciples know they need a break. So, as they often do, they take a boat ride, but the crowds on the shore don't think about how tired Jesus and his disciples are. Nowhere in the gospels does the crowd advise Jesus to take some time for himself. These people guess where Jesus is headed and get there first. You and I would have been annoyed, but Jesus feels compassion for them. He recognizes that they are like sheep without a shepherd. On this occasion, Jesus is unsuccessful in finding a quiet place, but his word to the disciples remains a good word to his disciples, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while."

Jesus frequently left the crowds to be by himself. He spent time alone before making big decisions. He spent forty days in the wilderness at the beginning of his ministry. He stayed up all night before choosing the twelve. When he heard that John the Baptist had died, Jesus went on a retreat. Before the cross, Jesus went to Gethsemane. The disciples often woke up to find that Jesus wasn't there. Early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus went for walks. He found his way to wilderness, mountaintops, and gardens.

Throughout Christian history, many spirit filled people have taken Jesus' example seriously. They've recognized that worship shouldn't be completely filled with words, for God speaks in the quiet. The Quakers focus on silence as the primary means of worship. Solitude gives God space to work.

Why don't we take time for silence? We have decisions to make that should lead us to quiet places. Some of you have to decide what school you should attend. How much of yourself do you give to your work? Which of your friendships do you keep and which do you let slip away? How will you know when the time is right to retire? How much should you give to support your church? How are you going to live out your faith? Sometimes it's only in the silence that we remember that we have a faith to live. Most of our clearest thinking happens in silence. Many of our worst decisions take place in the middle of the noise.

Magnificent things happen in silence: concerns are reevaluated; attitudes are changed; friendships are better understood; fears are examined; frustrations are relieved; the big picture is clarified; the trivial is pushed aside; possibilities are discovered; unrealistic expectations are discerned; hopes become clear; memories take on new meaning; directions are chosen; tensions are lessened; and sometimes an unspeakable holiness fills a silent place.

For us to experience silence, we'll have to pursue silence, or it might be better to say that we will have to work at it. You need a haven—the quiet of your bedroom or the kitchen table, a park, a path around your block. We need to take advantage of the quiet moments in our day: the minutes before everyone else awakens the cup of coffee at breakfast, the walk from your car to work. You need to slip outside just before bedtime and listen to the quiet. Those precious pieces of solitude are usually lost.

Those moments of silence move us beyond our selfish concerns. Choose something in creation, a flower or a hummingbird, focus on it, give thanks and find yourself less selfish. Pick something on the front page of the newspaper, a war, a tragedy, a controversy. Think about it in the light of faith. What might God think about this? Become less centered on self. Retreat for an hour or a day. Dream and hope. What kind of person would you like to be in a year? Five years? Ten years?

Imagine your way into this story. Picture yourself as one of the disciples, exhausted, but excitedly telling Jesus what's been happening with you. Hear Jesus tell you that it's time for you to take a break. What does that word mean to you? Picture yourself sitting on the shore listening to Jesus. What do you see? Look at the faces around you. Can you hear the water lapping on the shore? Are there children playing in the distance? Can you smell the grass? Is the ground beneath you hard? Is the wind blowing off the lake? Slow down and listen to Jesus speaking to you alone. Hear Jesus ask, "What would you like to tell me? What frustrations and hopes do you want me to know about?"

In theory, we know that silence yields insights, dreams, and possibilities. In practice, we keep filling our lives with noise. From time to time each day and each week turn away from the noise and listen to God's wondrous silence. "Be Still and Know that I am God" Ps 46. Amen