

2022 09 18 – Gratitude through Silence

Scripture: Psalm 46:1-3, 8-11
Mark 1:32-39 (The Inclusive Bible)

One of the things that I love about living in Southwest Saskatchewan is that I can get away from the noise of the city and find the gift of silence on the wide open prairie, in a sheltered coulee or amongst the lodgepole pines of Cypress Hills. When I hike deep into the coulees at Sask Landing I always savour the quiet serenity of that part of God's creation. [Experts tell us](#) that Grasslands National Park, only a couple of hours south of Swift Current, is one of the quietest places in North America.

Having lived in Southern Ontario, and in particular, in the city of Toronto, I know what it is like to be constantly bombarded by noise. When I was a student on a work term in Toronto, I lived in an apartment building at the junction of Highway 401 and the Don Valley Parkway. Even on the 14th floor, with the windows closed, I found the sound of passing semi's so distracting I could not go to sleep. In fact, I turned on the radio, to drown out the traffic, and eventually I discovered that country music was just the kind of white noise that I needed to go to sleep.

Silence is sacred. It is a gift from God. In that gift of silence we become even more aware of everything around us, and, in particular, of the presence of the Holy Spirit. As the psalmist wrote, "Be still, and know that I am God!" Be still. In order to truly appreciate the silence around us we must also be still, be silent. We have to allow the silence to entice our beings. And in that silence, that quiet, it is possible to hear the Word of God.

When we sit quietly in a quiet place and allow the silence to fill our being, then we call that practice prayer, or meditation or contemplation. Father Richard Rohr, a Franciscan priest, and the founder of the *Center for Action and Contemplation*, describes the power of inner silence in this way,

Outer silence means very little if there is not a deeper inner silence.

Everything else appears much clearer when it appears or emerges out of silence. Without silence, we do not really experience our experiences.

We are here, but not in the depth of here. We have many experiences, but they do not have the power to change us, awaken us, or give us the joy and peace that the world cannot give.

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Jesus also knew the power of outer and inner silence. Several times in the gospels, we read about Jesus going to a quiet place, away from the crowds and even from his disciples. In today's reading, Jesus is at the beginning of his ministry of healing and preaching the good news. But he takes the time to rise early in the morning, and he goes off by himself to a lonely place in the desert. And there he prays. We don't know how he prayed. He may have prayed in silence. He may have recited the Jewish prayers of his childhood. He may have spoken a specific prayer for that day. It gives me solace to know that, just like all the rest of us, Jesus needed his quiet time with God.

I'm not saying that the practice of contemplation is easy. It is often difficult in our busy lives to carve out those periods of silence. It is often difficult to find the right place or the right time for prayer. And even when we manage to find those

fleeting moments, then we often struggle to quiet our minds and reach the inner silence that is our goal.

I know. I struggle with this on a daily basis. That's why I treasure my Monday's, my Sabbath day and the time that I have in nature. That's why my days of continuing education are often centred around retreats that allow for both outer and inner silence. That's why, right now, I am part of a month-long online seminar that is focussed on helping the participants connect with our own inner wisdom, our own Sacred centre.

This is not easy work but is necessary. Finding time for deep inner silence is essential because it provides us the wisdom, the insight, and the inspiration to do God's work in the world. Richard Rohr puts it this way,

The opposite of contemplation is not action, it is reaction. We must wait for pure action which proceeds from deep silence.

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Father Rohr is telling us that it is not enough to just randomly react to what is happening around us. We need to act out of a place of deep knowing, a place of deep silence, a sacred place. When we do that then our actions have more meaning and we are more likely to act from a place of love, a place of peace, a place of justice.

We live in an incredibly divisive world. So many of the aspects of our life are being divided in two and we are being asked to take sides: right or left, vaccine or

no-vaccine, private or public. The problem with taking sides is that too-often we lose sight of the humanity of those on the other side. Taking sides also means that we are less likely to appreciate the complexities of whatever question we are facing. Here's one last quote from Richard Rohr:

The soul does not use words. It surrounds words with space, and that is what I mean by silence. Silence is a kind of wholeness. It can absorb contraries, paradoxes, and contradictions... true interior silence does not allow you to take sides. That is one reason contemplation is so liberating and calming. There are no sides to take and only a wholeness to rest in—which frees us to act on behalf of love.

<https://cac.org/daily-meditations/inner-silence-2020-01-08/>

True contemplation should be a part of every decision that we make, every action that we take, including how we spend our money, our treasure, our wealth.

Today is Mission & Service Sunday. On this Sunday our Outreach Committee is making a special plea to our congregation for monetary gifts that will be used to help people in need outside of our own congregation and community. I already give to Mission and Service through my PAR offering, but I will be topping up that giving with an extra gift today because I believe in the Mission & Service work of our United Church of Canada.

One of the things I love about the United Church is how we do mission. The money that we give to Mission & Service is spent in places of need across Canada and around the world. One thing we can be sure of is that it will reach the people who need it the most and that it will be used in ways that are most

beneficial to the recipients. We know that is true because our overseas work is all done through partner organizations on the ground in the countries that we support. Our mission is not about making religious converts. It is focussed on improving the living conditions of people who are struggling to survive. I invite you to prayerfully consider this request for support of the Mission & Service of our church.

And now let us a take a moment of grateful silence as our choir prepares their musical offering.