

Silence is the absence of noise. There seems to be more noise in our world than we have ever experienced.

On my freshman hall in college, we had one telephone for over 30 young men. The phone both stood outside my door. People lined up. Today...nearly everyone has their own telephone.

There is more noise than ever...even though we have ways to listen to one another, communication is still a problem.

It has seemed to me that even though the world is noisier than ever, you and I experience silence. On this Sunday, I am wondering what do we hear in the silence?

There is a silence that comes in two people when there is misunderstanding.

There is a silence in death.

There is a silence when we learn of a birth.

There is a brief silence when we learn of incredibly good news.

There is a silence when we feel more alone than ever and we ask ourselves and God. We may even ask someone close to us. "What am I going to do now?"

This morning, we read about Jesus and three friends. Jesus feels the need to take three of his closest disciples and go up on a mountain and pray.

They have tried to get away before. People followed...needing healing and encouragement. What was meant by Jesus as an officers' retreat turned into a serious ministry day. Fish sandwiches for 5000 or 15,000 if we count women and children. (Neumark, 16)

On their next time together, Jesus tells his friends that soon the Son of Man will experience great suffering, will be rejected by the religious leaders, be killed and on the third day rise again. I am sure they heard the first parts of that and never really understood the last. We often hear the bad news and never really take in the good. So...disciples are exhausted from ministry and afraid and worried about their future together.

Good time to pray. Jesus takes 3 of them. Not sure where this mountain is. Tradition holds it is Mount Tabor not far from Nazareth, southeast of Nazareth. A monastery has been built there.

Jesus arrives and starts praying. Almost immediately there is a whiteout. As Mary Gordon, a novelist has put it, "a whiteness whiter than the greatest bleacher. Coveted whiteness: labor intensive, precious and hard-won. What is white? Snow, stars and moon." Her description makes me think of last Wednesday morning as the Henrico Public School people were calling off school. With the 2-inch snow and the blowing wind, there was a brilliant whiteness that helps us imagine this moment.

Mary Gordon tells the story of wandering into a Catholic church in San Francisco. The Mass that day was being done half in Chinese and half in English. The priest was Chinese and spoke about this Transfiguration scene. She remembers his saying, "We don't know whether this really happened, but if it did, it was one of those moments when the veil between the invisible and the visible is torn away." He spoke of a mentally challenged man he knew. The priest had asked him once if he ever prayed. His friend said he had and that when he prayed he listened to God. The priest asked him if ever heard anything. "The man said, 'I hear: You are my beloved.' The priest told the congregation, This is what we should always be hearing. (Gordon, 42)

The disciples see two men, Moses and Elijah speaking to Jesus about his departure. The word departure is the Greek word for exodus, referring not only to Jesus' trip back down the mountain and into Jerusalem, but to Jesus'

death. As he speaks, they are overshadowed by a cloud. The disciples get scared. They probably remember Moses went into a cloud on a mountain in the Sinai peninsula. Now they hear a voice. The voice tells them who Jesus is and how they must respond.

If you haven't ever said something like this, you may have thought it. "God has never spoken to me before." Someone said this recently in Sunday school. "God has never spoken to me that way." Yet we are a people who claim we believe in the God who speaks. We believe God speaks in the person of Jesus Christ.

If you are hungry to hear God speak, you have been given a special gift. Ben Campbell Johnson has been a Professor of Spirituality at Columbia Seminary for years. He wrote a book several years ago entitled, *GodSpeech, Putting Divine Disclosures Into Human Words*. He maintains it is vital for people who believe in God to hear God speaking to them...not audibly...in the way God speaks. He believes God speaks in a lot of ways to us and we are like the disciples, we miss. We forget it. We discount it.

Ben Johnson gathered a group in Atlanta a few years ago "to listen for what God might say to them. A lawyer who was pressing middle age at first felt he couldn't be open and freely let words come to his mind. Yet when he did, an amazing insight about 'today' came to him. The following words suggest what can happen when a person truly notices his or her life. (Apparently this is what the lawyer wrote as a result of this experiment.

Today is my life.

Today is joy; it is full of light.

Today is not me.

Today my fears took a vacation.

Today the little things that annoy me became so little I could not see them.

Today my desires for tomorrow were covered by clouds.

Today my self-pity was pitiful.

Today the long hours turned into minutes.

Today my worries were pulled into the sky by a tornado.

Today my greed was bought with love.

Today my dreams became unimportant.

Today I wanted to see and not be seen.

Today I wanted to listen and not be heard.

Today I am not pleased with who I am.

Today I think I experienced for a moment denial of myself.

Today I felt your hand, your love, your light.

Today I hope tomorrow can be another today. (Johnson, 123-124)

Ben Johnson knows there are ways we can learn to hear God's voice.

This morning, this table has been set at Jesus' command. As you receive from this table, I hope you hear in your own particular silence: This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!

Loving God, our world and our heads are so full of noise we are like these disciples. We long to hear you speaking, but we often cannot. Enable us today to hear you speaking in these elements of bread and cup. Enable us to hear your still small voice in the silence of our lives. Our world is filled with hatred and gun fire and shouting and angry silence. Speak into the silences of our lives with your Word, Jesus Christ. We pray as he taught us...Our Father who art in heaven...

Gordon, Mary, Reading Jesus, A Writer's Encounter with the Gospels, Pantheon Books, New York, 2009.

Johnson, Ben Campbell, GodSpeech, Putting Divine Disclosures into Human Words, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2006.

Neumark, Heidi, "Altitude Adjustment," Sunday, *Christian Century*, February 6, 2007.