

Silence

Traditional Worship • July 15

- Prayer Concerns: The family of Peg Kincaid in her passing; Vira Cogswell.
- Today's Sanctuary flowers provided Rick & Dottie Durgy to the glory of God in honor of Seby's birthday.
- Today's choral selections are provided by the Temple Choir under the direction of Joan Nevill. Organist: Barbara Waite. Special Music provided by Joe Wells, tenor.
- Ushers (15): Eric Eades, captain; Seby Durgy, Chuck Taylor, Ronnie Pursley, Thornton Patberg (balcony), Margo Borre (balcony)
- Ushers (22): Eric Eades, captain; Chuck Taylor, Ronnie Pursley, John Oberhelman, Thornton Patberg (balcony), Margo Borre (balcony)
- Greeters (15): Warren & Rosemary Heinsohn, Janet Kissel, Mary Lockett
- Greeters (22): Pat & Ken Haynie, Tom Harvey

ORDER OF WORSHIP

PRE-SERVICE MUSIC

Congregational Hymns

WELCOME

PRELUDE

"Kum Ba Yah" arr. by J. Behnke

CALL TO WORSHIP

Leader: Come from your busy lives to a place of quiet and rest.

People: Our souls are thirsty for peace.

Leader: Come to the Lord to restore your soul.

People: God is our refuge and strength.

CHORAL INTROIT

"Bless the Lord" by B. Waite

*CHIMES & SERVICES OF LIGHT

*FIRST HYMN #139

"Praise to the Lord, the Almighty"

*PASSING OF THE PEACE

Leader: May the peace of Christ be with you.

People: And also with you.

Leader: Please turn to those around you and pass the peace of Christ.

SPECIAL MUSIC

"Grace Alone" by Brown & Nelson

CALL TO PRAYER

Leader: The Lord be with you.

People: And also with you.

Leader: Let us listen for God in the silence.

LORD'S PRAYER

VBS SLIDESHOW

GIVING OFFERING

"Simple Gifts" arr. by J. W. Kerr

*DOXOLOGY *the congregation stands as the Ushers return the offering to the Altar.*

#95 in Hymnal

ANTHEM

"My Shepherd Will Supply My Need" by Watts/Thomson

KDZ MOMENT

SCRIPTURE READING

James 3:1-5a

Taming the Tongue

³Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers and sisters, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. ²For all of us make many mistakes. Anyone who makes no mistakes in speaking is perfect, able to keep the whole body in check with a bridle. ³If we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we guide their whole bodies. ⁴Or look at ships: though they are so large that it takes strong winds to drive them, yet they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. ⁵So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great exploits.

SCRIPTURE RESPONSE TFWS #2120

"Spirit, Spirit of Gentleness (refrain)"

MESSAGE *by Pastor Andy Payton*

"Silence"

Well good morning everyone. It certainly is a joy to be with you in this holy space. A person once said that the only life worth having, the only world worth building, is the one that's modeled after the mind and spirit of Jesus Christ. Let me say that again. The only life worth having the only life worth living, the only world worth having, is the one modeled after the mind and the spirit of Jesus Christ. The way we live into the mind and spirit of Jesus Christ is through connecting with others by sharing our gifts with them and by exploring the faith. I think those are kind of like the core characteristics, the core ingredients of discipleship if you will. Well the last few weeks we've been talking about some ways in which we explore the faith and seek our connection with God. The first week of the series we talked about the importance of stillness, and basically what we talked about was how in stillness when we stop all the activity, we start to realize that we are more than what we do; and more to the point, we start to realize that God is able to act- is perfectly able- to act without us. Last week we talked about solitude and Pastor JillAnn -in my estimation- did a marvelous job on preaching about the importance of solitude. If you've not heard her sermon on solitude, you need to hear her sermon on solitude. She does a marvelous job dealing with the subject of solitude; but basically in solitude what we come to realize is that solitude is not as much about just time alone but specifically solitude from a faith perspective is about time alone with God. In solitude what we began to realize is that were more than what people say about us. More to the point, what's important is to realize who God says that we are- namely we are the beloved of God. Well today we're talking about silence and what I would like to suggest to you is that in silence what we start to realize is that we're more than what we have. And I'll talk a little bit more about that here in a moment, but before we dive in let's begin with the moment of silent prayer. Would you pray with me?

Oh God, it is in our stillness, solitude, and now silence we come to quiet ourselves to realize your presence and connection both with You who is the mystery of all life and You who is our connection with one another. I pray that you would in these next moments take the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts and that you would help them to be made acceptable in your sight. I pray this through Christ. Amen.

So our scripture lesson this morning comes from James. Of all the documents in the New Testament that I have read, I guess James is my favorite one or one of my favorite ones, and the reason is because it's an example of wisdom literature. Wisdom literature is basically practical advice on how to live. James is not as much theological as it is practical- do this, don't do that. I'm a simple person, and so I really enjoy "do this and don't do that" type of language, and if you like that, James is for you. James echoes more of the teachings of Jesus. Interesting side note, James echoes more of the teachings of Jesus than any other document within the New Testament except for of course the Gospels themselves. In our a lesson for today we find James talking about the importance of weighing our words. And he even goes to the point to say that if we are perfect in our speaking, then basically he suggests we're also perfect in our living and how we live our lives. This is a bold statement. If we can control our language, if we can control our speaking, if we can control what we say, James suggests then we can also control and direct the direction of our lives. Not only does James discuss the importance of weighing our words, but we find this theme again and again and again throughout the scriptures. Take for example Peter. Peter says "whoever will love life and see good days must keep their tongue from evil and their lips from deceitful speech". Also Paul writing to the church and Ephesus "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths but only what is helpful for building others up." Jesus said "what goes into someone's mouth is not defile them." There's a lot of debate in Jesus day about what a person could or could not eat. Here's what Jesus says though he says, "whatever goes in someone's mouth what they eat is not what defiles them. Instead it is what comes out of their mouth. What they say that ultimately defines them."

The point of it all is that our words have power. And when our words are used in a good and a healthy way, they build community, they help us to communicate, they help us foster communion. Our words have the power to give life. Think about it in terms of our ability to communicate, this is probably one of the greatest gifts that we have as human beings. We have the gift of language. We have the gift of words, and it's our words that help us to convey insights; it's our words that invite us to share experiences. It's our words that can connect us to one another. Our words can create communion. C.S. Lewis once said that friends are those people who care about the same questions. That quote got me through seminary friends or those who care about the same questions. They don't necessarily have the same answers, but they care about the same questions. Our words have this capacity to literally bring us together.

Ultimately our words have the capacity, have the power to give life. One of the most life giving things we can do for a person is to give them a word of encouragement, to give them a word of thanksgiving, to give them a word in which we rejoice in one of their gifts and who they are. And yet the reality is many times we don't use our words to communicate. We don't use our words to foster communion; and we don't use our words to give life. While we certainly live in a 'wordy world', sometimes our words do anything but these things. Sometimes we use our words to cut people down, don't we? I think about the words of a parent. Just the other day I was talking to a person and they told me about the experience they had in which a parent had said something very negative to them and how that word from that parent stuck with them their entire life. I think about words from religion. While much of the time religious language can be life giving, words giving, life encouraging, a lot of the time also religion can be used otherwise- to cut people down, to condemn, and to judge. Sometimes words and the grades we digest not only cut us down and cut other people down, but sometimes the words we digest leave us feeling somewhat inadequate like we need something else in order to be happy. I mean think about all the advertisements, all the words that we are given through advertising these days. I read an article the other day that said in the 1970s the average person digested around 500 advertisements a day. Today we digest around- one article suggested- 3 to 4000 advertisements a day which if we're not careful leaves us feeling inadequate like we need something else. If we don't think the words we digest don't have power, then think about how they end up making us feel.

Did you see the Build-A-Bear lines this past week? Incredible. Incredible. I mean did you see the video on Facebook of the two minutes that the lady drove around the Eastland Mall of the people who started it there standing there in line 7 a.m. in the morning to get a bear? And the thing that occurred to me as I looked at that is while it's not necessarily bad to want to bear- in fact I've been thinking about maybe we should give bears away at our church to get people to come to church sometimes. It might be the missing link for us. I don't know. But the thing that occurred to me is as I watched that video is I guess the struggle I have is that those folks felt like they needed that bear. They needed that bear or their child needed that bear.

So much of the time, the words we digest leave us feeling inadequate, like we need something else. Sometimes the words we digest can even become addictive. I mean think about the smartphone. My gosh. I read an article this week that said on average smartphone user touches -touches- their phone 2,700 times per day. That's a normal smartphone user. A chronic smartphone user touches their phone around 5000 times per day. They're the ones that have the extra battery pack, carrying it around because they are constantly petting their phone. I take that from John Welcher; it's not original to me.

But we live in a 'wordy world', and it does matter. The words that we use can give life or the words we use can give death. The words we use can make us feel like we're enough or the words that we digest and use can make us feel like we're not enough. The words that we use can set the direction of our lives. The words that we use can make us feel like we're less than what we truly are. And so the question is: how do we find self-control when it comes to our use of language? How do we find the capacity and the ability to navigate our tongue in such a way that we might use it in life giving ways rather than destructive ways? And one way I would like to suggest today is through the practice of silence. The ancients have come back to this again and again. The practice of silence does teach us on how to use language in life giving ways. The first thing I'd like to say about silence is that it is through the practice of silence, basically what we are able to do, is find our connection with God. It is in silence that we find our connection with God, who is the ground of our being, who is the foundation of all existence, who is the one that comes to us disguised as our lives. As we quiet down in silence, what we come to experience is the life giving love of God.

The way I would describe it as a sort of like a baptism. Silence is like a baptism. When we baptize children in our church, a lot of times what I'll say is 'in the waters of baptism, the labels of the world are washed away and were reclaimed for who we truly are- beloved children of God.' Well in silence what we do is we come to experience baptism in a very concrete way. In silence, as we shut up, as we stop the words, as we stop thinking the best that we can, what begins to happen is all these labels all these terms all of these words can begin to fall away and we're able just to be in the presence of God and come to realize that in this moment, at this time is enough because God is with us. Silence teaches us not only how to connect with God, but silence can also teach us on when to speak or how to speak. When we begin to connect with God, the God of life, we then also in turn begin to use our language in life giving ways. We use our language in such a way that we participate in the life giving love of God. We say yes to the River of Life which if you will is moving through all of creation and we certainly don't use it in such a way where we're cutting away at the life of others.

Finally, it is silence that teaches us how not to speak. And this is probably the hardest one of all. We all like to speak up, but we don't all like to be quiet, do we? But yet I think the Desert Fathers are right in this sense that rarely do we have to repent for being silent. It's when we speak up that we get into trouble so much of the time. A good practice is every time you engage in a conversation, every time you find yourself engaging in a new encounter with a group of people, you might ask yourselves 'will my words serve these people the best or will my silence serve them the best?' Will my words serve the situation the best or will my silence serve this situation in the best way? That's tough to do. I know..

I think about the story of Job where Job lost everything, and his friends, they did the best thing they could have when they just simply sat with him. Right? The story goes they just sat with him, didn't say anything at all; they were with them. And now when does the trouble come? When they start providing answers. The moment their mouth began to move is when everything began to go south in the story of Job. There's some wisdom in that. As a minister going to seminary I have to admit we learn a lot of words. We learn a lot of ideas. We learn a lot of things to say in certain circumstances. But the older I get, what I've come to realize is that much of the time, the most we can say is when we say nothing at all; we're just simply there with the person. We're just there. We call it the ministry of presence.

Friends hear me when I say this as a people of faith, much of the time what people need is not an answer. They don't need a word. They just need you. You being there with someone in the midst of heartache, suffering that's enough. It's enough.

I remember a couple of months ago, a friend from high school called me. This guy didn't come to church. I think I'm the closest thing he has to a pastor, but we grew up together. We grew up together the Loogootee, and I just can't believe our church is still standing with me and this same guy going to church together in those days. I can remember sitting in the back row VBS with him; his name is Jim. I can remember in the back row with Jim during VBS and both him and I looked at each other and said I don't even believe in all this stuff. Why do we have to come here? And he's like because my mom and dad maybe come here, that's why we're here, right? I can still remember those days with him. Well he called me a couple of months ago and he says Andy, my little girls had an accident. A dog bit her, and she's in the emergency room. Would you come? And I walked in, and a dog did bite her right in the face. And I just stood there and put my hand on his shoulder. And together we were there; and that's all that was needed.

It takes courage, I have found sometimes to shut up and to be with someone who is simply hurting. I think sometimes we throw language at it to sort of create a buffer between us and them, to keep us from feeling what they're feeling. Hear me when I say this, in this world in which we live that is so filled with words, what we need more and more of is people with the courage simply to be silent, to shut up and be present with one another. And to see one another for what we truly are- manifestations of the one living God who is speaking to us even at this moment into existence.

So stillness, solitude, silence. These are not marketable terms in our society today, but they are words that- hear me when I say this- have the capacity to give life if we engage them. In our stillness we realize that it's not all up to us. We realize that we are more than what we do that God is able to act apart from us. In Solitude we realize that we have to, and what do we have? We have heads full of words. We live in a world full of language, but if we let those words and that language fall away just for a little bit, we come to realize that we're so much more than all the ideas and opinions that we think we have.

So how do we practice silence? That's the question. I'll offer you three quick suggestions and then we'll move on. When I practice silent prayer, and I try to practice silent prayer every day, I find less and less use words to talk to God. And I just want to simply be in God's presence. And so I find these three things to be helpful for me as I try to engage God with my silence. First thing I realize in silence is that it's hard to keep your mind from wondering, and you need a point of focus. And so what I choose is my favorite name for God Aba. But you can use another one like Father or Jesus or Holy Spirit, whatever. It doesn't really matter. Just use your favorite name for God as a point of focus, as a way to create stillness within your thoughts. And what I do next is I take the name of God and I simply repeat it slowly to myself until my mind becomes still and I'm no longer seeking or searching or anything like that, I just am resting now in the presence of God- resting. I'm not thinking about God, I'm just resting. And it's there that I sit until my mind begins to wonder again, and I repeat the whole process over again.

But let me urge you something. Just 30 seconds of silence within your heart. And that you seek to carry that way into the world. And when you're silent within your heart, you can use a lot of words, but those words have power when you're silent within your heart.

Well good luck. The practice of silence is really the practice of failure. It teaches humility, I promise; but this much I do believe and know: if you have the courage to practice the life giving love of God, I'm just resting. And it's there that I sit until my mind begins to wonder again, and I repeat the whole process over again.

*LAST HYMN

"Simple Gifts"

*CHIMES & SERVICE OF LIGHT

BENEDICTION

POSTLUDE

"Hornpipe" by R. Dinda