

"Hunting for Jesus" Isaiah 40:21-31; Psalm 147:1-11; Mark 1:29-39  
Church of the Good Shepherd, Nashua, NH  
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***Listen.***

Tell me, what do you hear in this place?

The vibration of the organ, the singing of the person near you, the voice of the priest, your own voice speaking familiar, sacred words?

***Listen again, more deeply, what do you hear?***

The rain on the roof, the car in the street, the rustle of paper, the breathing of the person next to you. Even the silences of this place are full of their own secret murmurings.

***Now listen again,*** even more deeply. Do you hear the chatter in your own mind? The brain- that "judgment factory"- always producing opinions, judgments, observations, making plans for the future, ruminating about the past...

***Listen, and go deeper,*** and there you will hear the voice of God.

One of the many reasons we come to this place is because we long for a sacred, nourishing silence. Writer David Foster Wallace once described our culture as one of "Total Noise." We are constantly bombarded by noise: traffic, jets in the air, the jackhammers of progress. data, news, fake news, spin, political rhetoric, where reality is twisted and re-shaped, a thousand opinions constantly twittering at us like birds in an Alfred Hitchcock movie. Total Noise so loud it is hard to hear ourselves think.

*Even harder to hear the voice of God.*

We come to this place to learn again to listen to the nuances of silence. In this place, we encounter a holy silence against which we have no defenses: it seeps into our bones. Do we fear the silence? Poet David Whyte writes: "Silence is fearful exactly because in its spacious depths lies both the soul's sense of rest and its possible break for freedom." We may fear what silence reveals, yet we crave its depths and the treasures of freedom it provides.

Listen for the interplay of noise and silence in Mark's gospel as it comes alive in our midst.

It is the early days of Jesus' ministry. Much has already happened: On a stage set by his cousin John, Jesus is baptized in the Jordan River. Jesus emerges from the desert, carrying the spacious silence of the wilderness within him.

The first disciples begin to circle around Jesus like the moons of Jupiter, and the miracles begin. Jesus heals Simon's mother-in-law, cementing the devotion of these fishermen and drawing the curious to their door.

Soon it is all noise. Everyone talking about Jesus. The whole village crowding outside the house, the broken calling out for help, their voices raised in expression of raw need, asking for the impossible. Those with unclean spirits have been silenced, yet their eyes shout their inner torment. A cacophony of yearning, desperation, hope, and desire. Jesus is at the center Of Total Noise.

Gradually the crowds drift away and the house grows quiet. Only the clank of dishes in the sink. Soon the soft snoring of the disciples is the only sound as the stars shift silently above. In the great silence Jesus rises, stepping quietly over the sleeping forms of his new friends, walking into the waiting dawn, seeking a place of deeper solitude and silence.

If, like the disciples, we are hunting for Jesus, we will find him in the silence. There he experienced his fully human self, his mind's chatter speaking of the immense need, the overwhelming expectations, so much to be done, and how? In the silence Jesus turned down the volume of the world expressing its great need. When the headlines of chaos broke over him, the silence let Jesus hear another voice speaking a blessed assurance.

While we are hunting for Jesus, he is listening for the quiet whisper of truth that comes alive in the stillness. I imagine that this is what rises up out of the silence for him, news that is deeply true and welcomed, words ancient and familiar:

"Have you not known?" the voice whispers: "Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. God does not faint or grow weary; God's understanding is unsearchable."

God gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless.

Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; but those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

If you are craving silence in this noisy world, then honor that desire, don't just turn up the volume of distractions. As David Whyte writes:

"We are each surrounded by an enormous silence that can be a blessing and a help to us...a silence in which the skein of reality is knitted and unraveled to be knit again, in which the perspective of a work or a life or a relationship can be enlarged and enriched. Silence is like a cradle holding our endeavors, our will and our understanding in ways that allow them to grow and thrive; a cultivated and silent

spaciousness sustains us and at the same time connects us to larger worlds that, in the busyness of our daily struggle to achieve, we have yet to investigate."

If we are hunting for Jesus, we will find him in that great silent place, where once again God will renew our strength, and we will hear the great beating of eagle's wings as they lift us up.

***LISTEN.***

**AMEN**