

Introduction for July 18, 2010

Silence is not a common occurrence in most households or churches. Silence can be most awkward and foreboding. We tend to feel quite uncomfortable in moments of silence especially when it is unplanned or unexpected. To be silent indicates that we are listening, not talking. To be speechless, in our day, is very rare. To be still is even rarer. When the Queen of Sheba had seen the wisdom of Solomon, the Scripture says, "there was no more breath in her" (II Chronicles 9:4- ESV). She was stunned, silenced and still. When the Father said of His Son Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration, "This is My Son, My Chosen One, listen to Him...Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent..." (Luke 9:36). His disciples were stunned, hushed and astonished. It appears, from the passion narratives in the gospels, that while Jesus was carrying away our sin and guilt and bearing the wrath of God on our behalf, there was silence from the sixth until the ninth hour, an awesome quiet that saw the sun's light fail and the curtain of the Temple torn in two (Luke 23:44-45).

Silence, in our very noisy and blustery days, is almost unheard. We are a people of loud-sounding cymbals and tinkling brass. We speak boastfully and proudly of our accomplishments and abilities as though they were dependent upon us rather than derived from the mercy and grace of God. Yet, how quickly and suddenly the grave puts an end to our boasting and blustery declarations of autonomy. In the words of Shakespeare, there appears to be "much ado about nothing." How noisy we are in the holy presence of God! Yet, are we not commanded to "make a joyful noise to the Lord" and "to enter His courts with praise and His gates with thanksgiving" (Psalm 100)? It is true that we are summoned in Psalm 100 to sing joyfully and to lift our voices in praise and thanksgiving, however, too often, our noise is the noise of narcissism rather than the worship of our great and holy God. It is interesting to note that Psalm 100 is preceded by Psalm 99 which calls for the people to tremble and worship at His footstool. This is a profound sense of awe and being stunned by the presence of God, which then joins itself to open praise and thanksgiving to God. There are moments to be quiet (Ecclesiastes 2:7, "...a time to keep silence and a time to speak") and there are moments of ascribing greatness to God (Psalm 29). In the seasons of our lives, there will be times to be silent and stand in awe before God and times to be loud with singing and rejoicing. In Ecclesiastes 5:1-2, King Solomon wrote this, "Guard your steps when you go the house of God. To draw near to listen is better than to offer the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they are doing evil. Be not rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be hasty to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven and you are on the earth. Therefore, let your words be few."

It seems that in this day we are too busy to be stunned by the awesome greatness and presence of God. We are too engaged to be still and we are too proud to stand in awe. We flit about as though we are in control of our own destinies, while giving Almighty God a mere nod of recognition as we deem it appropriate. We are too long on being busy at religion and too short at pursuing God in relationship.

One of the marks of revival is silence – being stunned by the presence of God. Moses said to the children of Israel at the Red Sea, "Stand firm (still) and see the salvation of God...The people saw the great power that the Lord used...and the people feared." The word "fear" in this context implies that they were stunned and hushed.

Our text summons the whole of mankind to be silent before the Lord. It will do us well to heed this command and to grasp the reality of what it means to be still in the presence of God. A healthy silence will give way to a hearty praise and worship. Being stunned in the presence of God will satisfy the longing of the heart and strengthen the soundness of our minds. Being still and knowing that He is God will stir in the depths of our souls the quiet confidence that will enable us to stand firm in these days and to cry out to God for revival and reformation. "For thus says the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, 'In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and trust shall be your strength'" (Isaiah 30:15).