

March 28, 2021  
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Mark 14:26-41  
Greenland Hills United Methodist Church

What to Do When We Don't Know What to Do: Silence

Mark 14:26-41

New Revised Standard Version

When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. And Jesus said to them, "You will all become deserters; for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.'

But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee." Peter said to him, "Even though all become deserters, I will not." Jesus said to him, "Truly I tell you, this day, this very night, before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times." But he said vehemently, "Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you." And all of them said the same.

They went to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." He took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be distressed and agitated. And he said to them, "I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and keep awake." And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. He said, "Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want." He came and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, "Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep awake one hour? Keep awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." And again he went away and prayed, saying the same words. And once more he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy; and they did not know what to say to him. He came a third time and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? Enough! The hour has come; the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.

Silence. There are days that I crave silence, and days when I run from it. Silence is powerful. The focus of this Holy Week is silence as we take a deep breath and ground ourselves in God. This Lent we have focused on spiritual practices to help center ourselves in God as we experienced and practiced prayer, scripture reading, fasting, confession, and worship in our daily lives. When we don't know what to do, we go back to the basics of spiritual disciplines. When we don't know what to do, spiritual practices help connect us with God and can help us to experience God in new ways.

What quiets your heart, mind and soul? When we practice being silent, we can deepen our connection with God. Sometimes it is difficult to find a quiet place. If your family has small children, silence is next to impossible. I find silence on walks around the block with my dog, I find silence while I'm washing the dishes, or folding laundry. I find silence when I'm sitting outside feeling the breeze against my face.

While you're being quiet, ask God to guide you, to fill your heart with gratitude, patience, strength, and peace. Writer Thomas Merton said we all need silence and solitude in our lives to enable the deep inner voice of our own true self to be heard at least occasionally. We see it in Jesus' life when he slips out for some solitude and quiet. But there were challenges to Jesus practicing solitude and silence. There were demands from people who wanted his attention. Jesus knew that he needed time alone to be filled up so that he could go out again and serve God's people.

Silence helps us to depend on the inner peace that God alone gives. Silence helps us place our trust in God, our rock and our redeemer. Silence helps us to wait calmly despite all of the circumstances around us. Silence helps us place our lives in God's hands, our God who is our strength and our refuge.

I have to admit to you that silence sometimes makes me uncomfortable. When I'm in a conversation with someone and there is silence, I often am the one to start talking to fill the silence. So much of my day is filled up with noise, when there is silence it feels odd. When I make time to be silent before God, I have to really work not to fill the silence with noise from my head.

Silence is also hard because some of us have been unjustly silenced. Speaking out is a necessary part of the work of justice. As Martin Luther King, Jr. said, “The ultimate tragedy is not the oppression and cruelty by the bad people but the silence over that by the good people.” Writer Diana Butler Bass says, “Some silence fuels injustice; some silence is truth in the face of injustice. Silence can be indifference. Silence can also be profound empathy, a stunning solidarity. Knowing when to speak; knowing when to keep silence - this is a spiritual practice. And it is wisdom.”<sup>1</sup> Silence is inner work, giving us healing and insight, and making room for new awareness and activism.

This is a busy week in the Christian Church. Today is Palm Sunday but it is also Passion Sunday because it starts the week that we remember the last week of Jesus’ life when Jesus suffers. Passion comes from the Latin word *patior* meaning to suffer. On Good Friday Greenland Hills and New Church will worship together as we read the story of Jesus’ death. As we heard in our scripture reading, as Jesus prepared for his death, he spent time in silence. Jesus takes time away to be in quiet prayer with God. In the scripture passage that we heard, Jesus asks God that, if possible, could he be spared the suffering that is to come but then Jesus turns it back over to God, “yet not what I want, but what you want.” It is in creating the space and silence to *listen* for God’s will that Jesus hears and finds it. In order to truly listen, we must practice being quiet.

Jesus takes a few disciples to Gethsemane and asks them to stay awake and keep watch while he prays. Every time he returns to them, he finds them sleeping. How often do we tune out or turn our brains off when faced with scary and sad situations? How often does silence make us uncomfortable? Instead of using that quiet time away from the other disciples to pray or simply keep watch as asked, the disciples avoid the silence by falling asleep.

Just moments before, Jesus had predicted his disciples would desert him. Peter and all the others were quick to say they would not leave Jesus. They were quick to defend themselves. But words and actions do not always match up. Right afterwards, they did begin to desert Jesus, by falling asleep when he asked them to stay awake. What if, instead of trying to defend themselves, the disciples had just *listened* to Jesus? What if they had stayed quiet and let their actions do the talking and actually stayed awake when they were asked instead of just *saying* they would? Sometimes we talk too much – as a way of defending ourselves or trying to convince ourselves and others that everything is going to be okay. Practicing silence as a discipline can help us be more in tune with ourselves and with God, so that we don’t feel so pressured to always say the right thing. We can learn to be comfortable with silence in hard situations when there are no easy answers or right things to say.

We have to remember that silence gives us the opportunity to tune into ourselves and to hear what God is saying to us. I want to encourage you this week to start with five minutes a day of intentional silence. That might look like you turn off the radio/phone/podcast in the car or trying a meditation app. At the beginning of this Holy Week, how can you create space and silence for God in your daily life?

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<sup>1</sup><https://dianabutlerbass.substack.com/p/words-that-matter-and-things-that>