

Sermon Preached at the Episcopal Church of the Holy Comforter  
2701 Park Road, Charlotte, NC 28209  
The Fourth Sunday after Pentecost, June 20, 2010  
Year C, Proper 7 RCL [1 Kings 19:1-4, (5-7), 8-15a;  
Psalm 42; Galatians 3:23-29; Luke 8:26-39]  
The Reverend Scot McComas, Interim Supply Priest

*May the words of my mouth and the meditation of each of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, for you are our strength and redeemer. Amen.*

The reading today from First Kings is my favorite lesson in the Old Testament. The reason I love it is because it is about something in our society we don't get enough of—silence. Elijah, who some say is the second Moses, stood on the mountain as the Lord was about to pass by. “Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence.” I always have been intrigued with the term “sheer silence”—not just silence but sheer silence. Have you ever experienced that kind silence? It has a depth to it that ordinary silence does not have. The King James Version translation of this is, “a still, small voice.” Some biblical scholars say this may be better understood as “a sound of a tiny whisper.” I prefer the term, “sheer silence.”

Whatever term you prefer, we need that kind of silence in order for our spiritual lives to have some kind of depth. We can turn off the radio, the computer, the iPod, the TV, the beeps and bings on our phones, the texts, all those things that fill the air with endless noise—noise that often causes us to react immediately. We can just enjoy some silence—we need silence. But many folks do not enjoy silence. They are frightened by it or nervous by what it might produce. Some people always need to have some noise in the background in order to feel “normal.”

A few years ago I was in the mountains with some friends and as we were driving back to Charlotte they turned on the radio the moment we got in the car. I thought to myself, “How I wished I could have stayed in the mountains enjoying the beauty and the silence one cannot get in Charlotte.” I asked my friends if we could turn off the radio and enjoy some silence on the trip back. They looked at me in absolute amazement and distress. You would have thought I had asked them to give up their first-born child. Each of us deals with silence in various ways, or perhaps we don't cope with it at all.

I was speaking with Gail, the parish secretary, the other day and we were discussing how busy the previous week had been. Our parish has had three deaths in rapid succession. Things have been extremely busy. You have been though quite a bit here at Holy Comforter over the last eighteen months—not a

lot of time for silence. First, Sally, your assistant rector, left to be a rector in South Carolina. Then, David, your rector, left to take a call as rector in Winston Salem. Then you had a few weeks of supply priests. Then John, your interim, was here for thirteen months. I am here for six weeks until Kevin, your new rector, arrives. Recently, Carter, our long-time deacon here at Holy Comforter, died. All the while, you have been constructing a new building. You are working on the organ. Next there will be some work on Henry Hall and other parts of the parish building. It seems non-stop. Where is the peace? Where is the silence?

Well, in times like these, one has to be very deliberate in seeking silence. Deep silence can give one peace. Life goes on, especially in a parish the size of Holy Comforter. All the while, as Christians, we need to be deliberate in our prayer life, taking time for God as Jesus did. He went away to the desert or mountains to pray, to recharge his batteries, to take time for rest and reflection. Jesus needed to take time to listen for the voice of his Father, and so do we. Christ's life was a series of retreat and return, retreat and return.

Summer is a good time for that. We can take a much-needed break. We can sit in silence praying or meditating. We can recite the Rosary, as I do. We can try Centering Prayer. We can mediate on Scripture such as the bucolic image we find in today's Psalm, "As the deer longs for the water-brooks, so longs my soul for you, O God. My soul is athirst for God, athirst for the living God." As we thirst for God, silence connects us to the water of life. Only God can quench our thirst—nothing man-made can do that. But in order to be in relationship with God, we need to slow down and engage silence so we can truly feel that "peace which passes all understanding."

*[Personal story added here. To hear, listen to audio version.]*

When we rush around, sometimes we don't make time for God. Sometimes we have a monologue with God, asking for things. But why not let God speak to us? Why not let our conversation be a dialogue instead of a monologue? Silence helps us have a dialogue with God. We can begin to listen for that "still, small voice." We can engage silence, and after a while, encounter the sound of sheer silence.

Let us pray. O God, you have taught us that in returning and rest we shall be saved, in quietness and confidence shall be our strength: By the might of your Spirit lift us to your presence, where we may be still and know that you are God; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.