

Have you ever been caught in a sudden downpour while walking the dog? Or chased off a golf course or the lake by lightning? As a child, did you ever hide from a bully or run from noises in a dark room? In our readings today, the great prophet, Elijah hid in a cave and disciples cowered in the bottom of their storm-tossed boat. What do YOU do when noises around you are greater than faith?

It is easy to criticize the disciples' fear but where can you go when there is no place to hide? Why shouldn't they have been afraid? Elijah tried to hide. Peter wanted to be lifted up to Jesus' level. Both failed as they tried to determine the solution to their fears. *For both the answer came not in noisy actions, whether full of bravery or fear, but in their silence.* Please focus on two KEY WORDS in these texts – silence and faith.

SILENCE is the place where faith has opportunity to begin (when I listen for someone else's voice.) FAITH is what follows as God's breath then becomes the life of our actions. Elijah heard God only when it was quiet and disciples perked up only in the quiet that followed the storm.

Today I would like for you to consider "remember the Sabbath" as more than just spending an hour in worship once a week.

"Silence" finds a perfect ally in "the Sabbath" day rest. We would understand this better if we could *treat Sabbath as a "place" (like prayer) rather than a time (once a week.)* If we embraced it as an encounter with silence rather than thinking we needed to fill it with our noise.

Israel knew to remember the Sabbath, but had filled it with so many rules, expectations, and actions that they had forgotten the gift of the "silence" that is at the heart of Sabbath rest. We do the same!

Eugene Peterson says this: *"Sabbath means quit. Stop. Take a break. Cool it. The word itself has nothing devout or holy in it. It is a word about time, denoting our nonuse of it, what we usually call wasting time... that is also why the Sabbath is commanded and not just suggested, for nothing less than a command has the power to intervene in the vicious, accelerating, self-perpetuating cycle of faithless and graceless busyness, the only part of which we are conscious being our good intentions."*¹

Did you catch the emphasis on "silence" and "doing nothing?"

The movement in these texts is from NOISE (our stuff) into a SILENCE (an emptying of my fears, and ignoring of my distractions!) It is just like the time of confession in which we begin our formal worship! We need time to be quiet before God, so that God can be heard about our noise!

Aren't we often so busy (with control) that our noise prohibits or prevents FAITH? Elijah looked in the powerful noises of wind, earthquake and fire, but God was NOT THERE! In our way of thinking, these are *godlike noises* – so *they must have a message.* In the same way Peter thought walking on water was the ticket to closeness with God. But neither heard God in their noise filled actions.

¹ Eugene Peterson. Working the Angles. Eerdmans. 1987. pp. 67, 82.

*We always assume WE MUST REACT to be close to God. But how often does **noise** you make get in way of real solutions and Christ-like faith? How often does the intentional silence or Sabbath rest allow God to give what he has always offered but got missed in noise?*

I will quote again from Eugene Peterson, for like so many others who have written on the topic of Sabbath rest, he focuses more on the rest, than on it being only in one time or place. He writes:

“Monday is my Sabbath. Nothing is scheduled. My wife joins me for the day. We pack a lunch, put it in a daypack, take our binoculars, and drive anywhere from fifteen minutes to an hour away to a trailhead along a river or into the mountains. Before we begin our hike, my wife reads a psalm and prays. After our prayer there is no more talking – we enter into a silence that will continue for the next two hours, until we stop for lunch.

We walk leisurely, emptying ourselves, opening ourselves to God ... At regular intervals we all need to quit our work and contemplate God’s, quit talking to each other and listen to Him. God knows we need this and has given us a means in sabbath – a day for praying and playing, simply enjoying what he is.²

See what comes out of Sabbath “silence” when it not a “day off” but a day of “holy rest?” Anyone can pray for miracles. The power! The majesty! The glory of God! We think “walking on water” would be the ticket to prove that God is changing my life. But the true awareness of God’s power is the embracing of FAITH (a noiseless moment) – and faith comes only when we let go!

Remember the axiom “*children are to be seen and NOT heard?*” That is more than respect – it is an opportunity to learn and to grow. And having a child like faith begins by being silent and listening in that silence.

When we talk about this holy quiet time, we have two goals. The first is to “OBSERVE the SABBATH.” Be quiet and learn from God. And the second is to realize that in SILENCE God has opportunity to fill us with FAITH.

Henri Nouwen (a priest, writer, and psychologist) said, “*to live a Christian life means to live IN the world without being OF it. It is in solitude that this inner freedom can grow. Jesus went to a lonely place to pray, that is, to grow in the awareness that al the power he had was given to him; that all the worlds he spoke came from his Father; and that that all the works he did were not really his but the works of the One who had sent him.*”³

What do you think Israel’s 40-year silence in the desert was for?? Or Jonah’s three days in belly of whale? Elijah learned from silence in cave, as did Peter when the wind and his voice stopped roaring. And now you also understand the power of Jesus 3 days in tomb -- and why those three days of SILENCE are the most important three days of our WORSHIP!

² Peterson. pp. 81-82

³ Henri Nouwen. Out of Solitude. Ave Maria Press. 1974. p. 21.

How about this? Silence and faith are the antidotes to noise and fear!

Nouwen writes: A life without a lonely place, that is, a life without a quiet center, easily becomes destructive ... In solitude we can slowly unmask the illusion of our possessiveness and discover in the center of our own self that we are not what we can conquer, but what is given to us.

In solitude we can listen to the voice of him who spoke to us before we could speak a word, who healed us before we could make any gesture to help, who set us free long before we could make any gesture to help, who set us free long before we could free others, and who love d us long before we could give love to anyone ... When you are able to create a quiet place in the middle of your actions and concerns, your successes and failures slowly lose some of their power over you.⁴

For many years I spent half a day each week in a retreat setting. Praying, walking in silence, reading, and then writing. I was criticized by some for wasting time and yet those times helped me be closer to God and gave me inspiration for all that I was called to share with you. Over the past two years I have gotten so busy that I have not taken that time and realize now how much it is missed, and how empty I sometimes feel.

I need to learn again about Sabbath rest and how important silence is to truly hear God's voice and be filled with the presence of his peace.

Psalm 46:10 says, "Be still and know that I am God!"

⁴ Nouwen, pp. 21-22.