

**Winchester, Eastleigh and Romsey Circuit
Worship at Home: Sunday 10th July 2022**

Preparation for Worship

Read 1 Kings 19.1-12

Listen to the silence – the sound of God
The silence out of which God speaks...
The sound from which God calls...

Listen, sing, read or pray:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hz5NYG2kP8k>

Be still, for the presence of the Lord,
the Holy One, is here;
come bow before him now
with reverence and fear:
in him no sin is found --
we stand on holy ground.
Be still, for the presence of the Lord,
the Holy One, is here.

Be still, for the glory of the Lord
is shining all around;
he burns with holy fire,
with splendour he is crowned:
how awesome is the sight -
our radiant King of light!
Be still, for the glory of the Lord
is shining all around.

Be still, for the power of the Lord
is moving in this place;
he comes to cleanse and heal,
to minister his grace:
no work too hard for him -
in faith receive from him.
Be still, for the power of the Lord
is moving in this place.

David J. Evans (b. 1957) Reproduced from Singing the Faith Electronic
Words Edition, number 20 Words and Music: (c) 1986, Thankyou Music.
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Prayers

Be silent.
Be still.
Alone.
Empty
Before your God.

Say nothing.
Ask nothing.
Be silent.
Be still.
Let your God look upon you.
That is all.
God knows.
God understands.
God loves you
With an enormous love,
And only wants
To look upon you
With that love.
Quiet.
Still.
Be.
Let your God—
Love you.

(Edwina Gately)

Epistle: Colossians 1.15-19

Gospel reading: Luke 10.25-42

Reflection

Doing and being

The story of how Elijah finds God – not in the earthquake, wind or fire but in the sound of sheer silence - brought me up short early in my time as a minister. I realised I rarely found time to stop and be – with myself – or with God. It wasn't that what I was doing wasn't good but in Jesus' words to Martha, I was '*distracted by many things.*' It led me to question the Christian tendency to become so distracted by our busyness that we have no time for God, the assumption that we don't have time to stop and can leave contemplation and silence to others. I learnt that we can't, because unless they're at the heart of our lives of service, what we do will speak of ourselves and not of God.

Many of us find Martha's story and the way Jesus treats her challenging because it sounds as if Jesus is giving work usually done by women, secondary status. He's not doing that - but to understand what is happening, we need first to look at where this story is in Luke's Gospel and

then secondly, at the story itself. The story of Mary and Martha comes in a long section of Luke's Gospel – from chapter 9 to 19 – that's about discipleship. Jesus goes to Martha's house soon after he's told the parable of the Good Samaritan to the lawyer who wants to know how to inherit eternal life. That story ends with Jesus telling him to go and do what the Samaritan did and, having heard that, we'd expect Jesus to praise Martha for serving her guests. So, it comes as a surprise – to us, the disciples and to Martha - when Jesus doesn't. Their surprise is intensified because Mary is breaking normal social conventions. Women did not sit at their teachers' feet. But Jesus often questioned social norms. So, just as he'd challenged the lawyer to rethink who his neighbour is with his story about the despised Samaritan, he challenges Martha and the disciples about discipleship. First, he says that women are equal disciples and second, that all discipleship begins at his feet - listening to and learning from him. Luke places these two stories together to tell us that we cannot choose to be disciples who focus on either doing or being, service or prayer, action or contemplation. They need to be held together in our lives - just as they were held together in Jesus' life.

But if doing and being, service and prayer, action and contemplation are all important, why does Jesus then say, *'Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her'*? To understand this, we need to consider Luke and Jesus' comment that Martha was worried and distracted by many things. The root of the word *'worry is strangle or seize by the throat and tear. [And] the root... of... distraction is a separation or a dragging-apart of something that should be whole.'* These are violent words that speak of fracturing, dividing into parts and suggest a state of mind that lead people to lack wholeness <https://www.journeywithjesus.net/essays/2282-only-one-thing> If that was Martha's state of mind, it's hardly surprising that Jesus points it out because being worried and distracted was getting in the way of her discipleship. She was serving

them but she was in such a state, so split and torn, that she can't have done it with anything other than bad grace. So, she couldn't enjoy Jesus' presence, or receive anything from him. But we do need to be careful - because when Jesus tells Martha that, *'Mary has chosen the better part'*, he isn't saying Mary is better than Martha. He's contrasting Martha's torn and divided mind and heart with Mary's choice to do one thing in this moment – to listen, pay attention, and allow herself to be challenged and opened up by his teaching. Because this is the starting point for all discipleship. When Jesus says there is *'need of only one thing'*, that one thing is him, and we find it at his feet.

STOP! in the name of God

Another way of thinking about the relationship between Mary and Martha, busyness and silence, is to think about the waves and the ocean. Waves rush across the ocean, going back and forth, as if frantic and worried. Whereas in the depths of the ocean, there is stillness, silence and tranquillity. When we sit at Jesus' feet, we're asking God to wake the wave up, to show us what we're doing, and to deepen our lives until we settle as the ocean into our true nature as a beloved child of God. Every year the Retreat Association encourages Christians to 'STOP! in the name of God'. This year it's 8th to 10th July. <https://www.retreats.org.uk> So, what might this look like in today's world when our lives are busy and there are many distractions.

For some, it's about taking a day out of our normal activities, making space for something different. Mary Oliver's poem *'Today'* says something of what happens for her when she does this.

*...The world goes on as it must,
But I'm taking the day off.*

Quiet as a feather.

*I hardly move though really I'm travelling
a terrific distance.*

*Stillness. One of the doors
into the temple.*

The 'temple' is the temple of our minds, bodies and lives that God longs to inhabit ever more fully. My way of stopping in the name of God is by putting time aside most mornings. I spend 25 minutes in silence and my quiet space has a large icon of Jesus in it. Maybe I'm sitting at his feet. The radio series, *'Living with the Gods'* by Neil MacGregor takes an item from the museum and reflects on what it says about how people express faith. In *'Let us pray'*, he speaks about one of the most popular pictures in Europe and America in the early 20th century. It's a man and a woman standing in a field at twilight in silent prayer. It's called The Angelus – the series of bells rung at 12 noon and 6pm – that call people to stop what they're doing for a moment and direct their thoughts to God where they are. These are just a few ways of doing just 'one thing' for a moment – minutes – or days. The point about them is that they're intentional and when we're intentional about making space for God, something happens.

Often, when I sit in silence, my mind fills up with the news, with what's going on in my life, and distractions like 'do I wash today or tomorrow?' Sometimes I think I'd be better stopping but I don't because silence is where change begins. The importance of a silent, listening space isn't what happens during it, it's how it affects our daily lives, enabling us to become disciples who are more gracious, compassionate, generous and loving, and more aware of how God is calling us to change, in our lives and God's world. When we are intentional about making space for God, we are caught up in the process in which we, and God's world, become ever more whole. Through prayer and silence, God's spirit inhabits us, ever more fully and ever more deeply - the power of the worries and distractions that prevent us from living as whole people gradually lessen. Another way of saying this is that, as we become the people God created us to be, we become ever-more effective tools of God's kingdom. That's why we focus on the 'one thing' who is God.

But don't expect the ways you choose to make space to listen to God to be as calm and peaceful

as the ocean. Silence takes us deeper into the life of the world. So, there will be times, when we're torn apart or despairing like Elijah, by the violence, poverty and suffering of the world and our part in it. Then, we need to remember that although God is present with those experiencing earthquake, wind or fire, God's is the still, small voice that emerge from silence. There will be times when we struggle with doubts or fears about God, about our relationships and lives - and other people's. Then, we need to remember that when Jacob wrestled with God through the night, even though he walked away injured, God blessed him. There will be times when we'll feel like the lawyer who asked Jesus the way to eternal life, only wanting reassurance, but had his understanding over-turned and was challenged to change his ways.

When these things happen, we need to know that in Christ, *'all things hold together.'* My icon is of Christ Pantokrator, a Greek word that means 'ruler of all', or 'holder of everything'. I find that comforting because even when we are despairing about the world or our lives, we also know that *'there is nowhere God is absent, powerless or irrelevant, no situation in the universe in the face of which God is at a loss... [and] there is no situation in which God is not to be relied upon on.'* (Rowan Williams). Faced with the huge problems of the world, and our own lives, we need to know this - and knowing it, to trust it - and trusting it to know that even if all we can manage that day is the moment of quiet that follows the Angelus Bell, we are being drawn deeper into God. God will continue to seek us, to call us, and to draw us closer - for our sake and for the sake of the whole world.

This is all why I want to encourage you to STOP! in the name of God intentionally, and, if possible, every day. Stop, because it will enable you to notice and listen to the voice of God – in scripture, in silence, in the voices of others. Stop, because unless we do, life's distractions and worries will direct our discipleship rather than Christ. Stop, because the world needs disciples

whose active lives of service are rooted in listening to God. We can only do that when we make time to sit at Jesus' feet. So, my prayer for you – as individuals, churches and a circuit – is that you STOP! in the name of God.

Listen, sing, read or pray

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Em3SRPA-N8Q>

Dear Lord and Father of mankind
forgive our foolish ways;
re clothe us in our rightful mind;
in purer lives thy service find,
in deeper reverence, praise.

In simple trust like theirs who heard
beside the Syrian sea
the gracious calling of the Lord,
let us, like them, without a word
rise up and follow thee.

O sabbath rest by Galilee!
O calm of hills above,
where Jesus knelt to share with thee
the silence of eternity,
interpreted by love!

With that deep hush subduing all
our words and works that drown
the tender whisper of thy call,
as noiseless let thy blessing fall
as fell thy manna down.

Drop thy still dews of quietness,
till all our strivings cease;
take from our souls the strain and stress,
and let our ordered lives confess
the beauty of thy peace.

Breathe through the heats of our desire
thy coolness and thy balm;
let sense be dumb, let flesh retire;
speak through the earthquake, wind, and fire,
O still small voice of calm!

John Greenleaf Whittier (1807-1892) Reproduced from Singing the Faith

Prayers for God's people and world

Pray in your own way for:
the Church,
the rulers of the nations,
for the peoples of the world,
for your local community and family
for yourself.

The Lord's Prayer

Prayer of Dedication

Offer your regular giving and your life to God.

Listen, sing, read or pray

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XzwFRjNXsP8>

Speak in the stillness, God we pray,
come to our hearts and meet us here.
Bring us your peace for each new day
- the gift of grace to earth from heaven.

We speak as though we have not heard
and live as if we do not know
your love in Christ, the living Word
- the gift of grace to earth from heaven.

When, in the anxious rush of days,
we lose our hold on faith and you,
reclaim us with your calm embrace
- the gift of grace to earth from heaven.

Lift us to see with heaven's eyes.
We long to soar on eagles' wings
as we press on to claim your prize
- the gift of grace to earth from heaven.

So may we be renewed in love,
held and sustained by you alone.
Strengthened by you that we may prove
a gift of grace to earth from heaven. (Amen.)

Gareth Hill (b. 1956)

Blessing

Send us out into the world to live to your glory.
Enable us to be alert to the ways you nudge us to
hear you calling and point us in your way. Make
us bold to resist those who would keep us in
comfortable well-trodden paths so that – like
Mary – we make time to break free and sit at
your feet.

And may the blessing of God,
Creator, Redeemer and Life-giver
be among us and the earth's many peoples,
this day and every day and night. Amen.

Service prepared by Rev Sue Keegan von Allmen.

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