

Scripture & Silence

The following texts are intended to help a group begin to explore the place of silence in the liturgy. In addition to evocative descriptions of silence and peace there is one passage that uses silence in a way people may find difficult and finally some passages about the place of noise in our worship as a contrast.

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while the spirit of God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day. [Genesis 1:1-5]

The Lord said to Elijah, 'Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord, for the Lord is 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. When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. [1 Kings 19:11-13]

I will hear what the Lord God has to say, a voice that speaks of peace, peace for his people and his friends and those who turn to him in their hearts. His help is near for those who fear him and his glory will dwell in our land.

Mercy and faithfulness have met;
justice and peace have embraced.
Faithfulness shall spring from the earth
and justice look down from heaven.

[Psalm 84 (85): 9-12]

For while gentle silence enveloped all things, and night in its swift course was now half gone, your all-powerful word leaped from heaven. [Wisdom 18:14-15]

For everything there is a season,
and a time for every matter
under heaven:
a time to be born, and a time to die;
a time to plant, and a time to pluck up
what is planted;
a time to kill, and a time to heal;
a time to break down,
and a time to build up;
a time to weep, and a time to laugh;
a time to mourn, and a time to dance;
a time to throw away stones,
and a time to gather stones together;
a time to embrace,
and a time to refrain from embracing;
a time to seek, and a time to lose;
a time to keep, and a time to throw away;
a time to tear, and a time to sew;
a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;
a time to love, and a time to hate;
a time for war, and a time for peace.

[Ecclesiastes 3:1-8]

The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. He said to them, 'Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.' For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. [Mark 6:30-32]

As Jesus and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!' Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, 'Son of David, have mercy on me!'

[Mark 10: 46-48]

So the shepherds went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

[Luke 2:16-20]

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.

[John 14:27]

Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

[Philippians 4:5-7]

Let a woman learn in silence with full submission. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent.

[1 Timothy 2:11-12]

Then the prophet Miriam, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine in her hand; and all the women went out after her with tambourines and with dancing.

And Miriam sang to them:

'Sing to the Lord,
for he has triumphed gloriously;
horse and rider he has thrown into the sea.'

[Exodus 15: 20-21]

So David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom to the city of David with rejoicing; and when those who bore the ark of the Lord had gone six paces, he sacrificed an ox and a fatling. David danced before the Lord with all his might; David was girded with a linen ephod. So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the Lord with shouting, and with the sound of the trumpet.

[2 Samuel 6:12-15]

Shout to the Lord all the earth,
ring out your joy.
Sing psalms to the Lord with the harp
with the sound of music.

With trumpets and the sound of the horn
acclaim the King, the Lord.

[Psalm 97 (98): 4-6]

Make a joyful noise to the Lord,
all the earth.
Worship the Lord with gladness;
come into his presence with singing.

[Psalm 99(100): 1-2]

And Mary said,
'My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices
in God my Saviour.'

[Luke 1:46-47]

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