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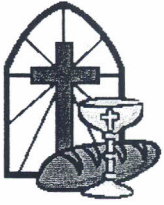


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Silence: A Lord's Supper Meditation

MARKUS McDOWELL

We might usually define "silence" as a lack of something.

But in truth, silence often communicates all too clearly:

One you love refuses to speak to you, to answer you, because he or she is angry.

The awkward silence when we have said something inappropriate.

The hurt that slowly rises within us when we realize that silence means no one is listening to us.

Sometimes silence means waiting:

A noise in your house at night when you are supposed to be alone and you stop and wait ...

A judge reads the verdict to himself as the defendant stands waiting ...

Often, we don't like silence. It makes us uncomfortable. We feel the need to fill the spaces of our lives with activity and sound. We turn on the radio, even though we aren't listening to it. We turn on the television, even though we aren't watching it. We talk when we really have nothing to say.

Maybe we are afraid to be alone with our own thoughts.

Maybe we are afraid of where our thoughts might wander.

A Psalmist asks God why he stands so far off ...

Job screams: ANSWER ME, GOD! ... and there is nothing.

Sometimes God is silent. Yet, surprising as it may sound, part of our response to God should be, at times ... silence. During the great ancient festivals in Israel—*Shavuot*, *Yom Kippur*, *Pentecost*—the Temple precincts were alive with noise: exuberant singing, laughing, rejoicing. Inside the wall of Gentiles, closer to the Temple itself, hymns were solemnly sung, prayers quietly spoken. But inside the Temple itself, near the Holy of Holies, near the very presence of God ... not a word was spoken.

Sometimes, noise covers up ... but silence can reveal.

Sometimes, sound brings us comfort ... but silence can teach us awe.

Sometimes, words are empty ... but silence can speak volumes.

We read in the Law of Moses, "Keep silence and hear, O Israel: this day you have become the people of Yahweh your God." We read of God's suffering servant in the prophets: "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth." John writes in his Revelation that when the seventh seal was opened, there was silence in heaven for 30 minutes.

Jesus: on the cross, the horror of a broken body and a bloody death.

He breathes loudly and painfully. He speaks a few agonizing sentences.

Jesus: the sacrifice for our sin, the gift of God to us ... a broken body, spilled blood ... he utters his last words ... and falls silent. No breathing. No sound. No words.

Sometimes, silence speaks volumes.