

ST. ANDREW'S PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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A life worth sharing.



WEEK THREE



THE QUIET CENTER

MARK 1:32-39
MAY 22, 2022
SHANNON COON

THE BIG IDEA

Jesus' ministry began with massive popularity and lots of people vying for his healing touch. In the middle of the frenetic pace, Jesus was intentional about withdrawing to a solitary place to pray. The spiritual author Henri Nouwen writes, "The more I read this nearly silent sentence locked in between the loud words of action, the more I have the sense that the secret of Jesus' ministry is hidden in that lonely place where he went to pray, early in the morning, long before dawn. In the lonely place Jesus finds the courage to follow God's will and not his own; to speak God's words and not his own; to do God's work and not his own...It is in the lonely place, where Jesus enters into intimacy with the Father, that his ministry is born." In Luke's Gospel, we are told that Jesus regularly retreated into silence and solitude. Because we are Jesus' disciples learning to live like our teacher, we truly have something to learn about the importance of silence and solitude ("siletude"). If Jesus needed such times in his life, then we need them even more!



GETTING STARTED

1. Can you think of a time you spent in silence alone and it was a positive experience? What made it positive? If you do not spend regular times in silence and solitude right now in your life, what prevents you from doing so?
2. What stands out to you from today's scripture?



LEARNING & LIVING OUT SCRIPTURE

Together, read THE SCRIPTURE OF THE SERMON

3. Notice the activity before and after verse 35. Why do you suppose Mark chose to include this detail in the flow of the narrative?
4. When Simon came looking for Jesus and told him that everyone was looking for him, Jesus' response seems a little odd. Why?
5. Have you ever had a time in your life when it seemed you were headed in a certain direction but then either heard a word from God or felt a "nudge" that told you to go in a different direction? What was it like for you?
6. Author Henri Nouwen says, "Without solitude it is virtually impossible to live a spiritual life...we do not take the spiritual life seriously if we do not set aside some time to be with God and listen to him." What do you think of that statement?

NOTES FROM SHANNON:

Here are a few good reasons to make silence and solitude a regular practice in the rhythm of your life:

-Many people fear being alone. There is a difference between loneliness and solitude. Loneliness is an emptiness, solitude is fulfillment. Practicing solitude helps us overcome the fear of being alone because we can be with the One who never leaves us alone!

-Regular silence teaches us to better control the use of our tongues! The more we practice intentional silence, the more we become intentional about when to speak and when to refrain from speaking.

-Going to God regularly reminds us that we are never really in control, but God is.

-We spend so much of our time either worried about what other people think of us, or defending/proving ourselves to others. In silence and solitude with God, we can stop all that and just "be."

-“Wasting time with God” is a great way to not say anything to God, but just remain empty for how God may want to fill us.

- Silence with God means we also position ourselves to hear from God. Silence and solitude are conducive to listening to God.
- We need rest. Rest for our bodies, our minds, our souls. Silence and solitude give us deep rest.
- As Jesus went out into the wilderness and confronted the “beast” (Satan), we too confront our “beasts.” Time in solitude helps us face the darkness inside of us. It is a place where we can confess, repent, receive God’s grace.
- We have many “voices” in our lives – constant media, friends, family, other leaders who want to speak into our lives. Silence and solitude help us to quiet all the other voices so that we can attune to the one Voice that desires to speak the truth to us. The practice of silence and solitude (“siletude”) can be practiced in these ways:
- 5-10 minutes each morning before you do anything else. Just sit in silence.
- Pausing at the beginning of each new activity of the day and reminding yourself of God’s immediate presence.
- Withdrawing before work or at lunch break for fifteen minutes of silence and prayer.
- While doing a task, turn off any background noise and be present in the task, offering it up to God.
- Replaying before falling asleep the day’s encounters and events and noticing where God has been present in grace and blessing.

Here is how you can get started:

- Start with ten minutes of time where you can be alone and uninterrupted.
- Set a timer so that you don’t have to look at the clock.
- Settle into the quiet and intentionally place yourself in God’s presence.
- As you become quiet, what do you hear – voices, traffic, wind, your breath, your heart? Do distracting thoughts come to you? Let the noise go. Be with God.
- After ten minutes, reflect on what it was like for you to simply become still enough to either hear nothingness, or to hear the background.
- You could try this several times a day, or work your way up to 15, 20, 30 minutes at a time. Note that the benefits of being silent are often seen in the fruit it bears rather than in the experience of silence.

SUGGESTED RESOURCES:

Out of Silence, Henri Nouwen, Ave Maria Press, 1974.
Invitation to Silence and Solitude, Ruth Haley Barton, Intervarsity Press, 2004.