August 9th, 2020

Springfield Presbyterian Church

I’m Not Even Sure Anymore What Season We Are In.

The 152nd Day of March

**The Sound of Sheer Silence**

I. The Sound of Silence

 I remember preaching on silence before, with the hauntingly beautiful arrangement of “The Sound of Silence” being played on the piano by Aaron. I listened to the version from the band Disturbed again this morning, feeling that same chill, that same recognition of the eerie and enlightening power of silence.

 I preached about this topic though before Corona. Somehow days seems to be pre-corona or coronatide, as we wait for the post-corona days to come. Silence is different these days, as we work in our homes, as we no longer crowd around for concerts, or as we no longer gather for family time. While some homes are bustling with noise from kids at home from school or families adjusting to this new season of life, some homes are also hauntingly quiet.

 My house is the latter. Well, unless Fritz sees a deer or a fox...then all bets are off. But what I’ve recognized in this time is that I’ve sought to push the silence out, by putting on Netflix in the background or putting a record on and having the music fill the house. None of this is bad, in moderation, but our society is so fast paced that silence can make us incredibly anxious.

 What is so scary about the silence? If we are silent, that means we think we are unproductive, which is not seen as positive in this society. If we are silent, maybe the thoughts that haunt us will creep in – thoughts of memories past, or things unreconciled, or conversations we need to have but do not want to. If we are silent, perhaps we will find out more about God and more about ourselves, which can be both overwhelming and wonderful.

II. I Kings

 Elijah was waiting in the silence, waiting for the very Word of God to speak and to give him the message he needed. Elijah pled with God, he said, “I have been faithful while the Israelites have forsaken God’s covenant, thrown down altars, killed your prophets. And now I’m here, all by myself, and they want to take my life.”

 And so God told him to go out on the mountain and await for God’s message, and so Elijah stood in silence, awaiting some word of hope and sustenance for these weary times.

III. We wait

 I wonder, if we, alike Elijah, are waiting – waiting for a word of hope, a word of guidance, a word that will rekindle the peace that once dwelt in us before these turbulent times. We are human, we want the quick answer, the one that is clear, astute, and brief, leading us right where to go, without question or ambiguity.

 We watch the world around us and perhaps Israelites are not throwing down altars, but there is much chaos still. Perhaps we fear for our jobs, our friendships, even our own lives if we want to stand up to this chaos. We look on as political fractures grow deeper and deeper, where food and water are a luxury, where children and parents are separated at the border, where people break others down instead of building them up, and so on, and so on. The list of possible chaotic things in our world is sadly too long to list in a sermon, but we know those things that break our hearts and labor our minds and we turn the volume up to blare out the sound of the pain that rings around the world.

 And so with Elijah, in faith, we come to the mountaintop, to our porches, to the windowsill and wait, trusting that God will fill the void.

IV. The loudness

 Elijah hears the wind that breaks the firmament, the earthquake rumbling below his feet, and the fire that blazed before him. Yet we are told, over and over again, that God was not in any of these signs – signs of wonder, magnitude, and loudness. No, God was in the still small voice that you could barely hear, a sacred whisper where Elijah had to be so quiet to even recognize.

 Yet, again, there was God, there was the Spirit – in the sacred still small voice which seems to have more power than the earthquake, fire, and wind combined. The power of sheer silence overtook any natural or unnatural wonder, the voice was so strong that Elijah covered his face and turned back towards the cave, overwhelmed and overtaken by something more divine then he could put into words.

V. Overwhelming Silence

 Silence is a mighty power and as the days continue, I learn about this sacred whisper more and more. In these corona times, I’m also learning more about a tradition that thrives in silence, the practice of being Quaker. While there is something sacred about this liturgy, this confession that we share together and by our interwoven prayers, there is something equally as sacred about silence.

 Bryan is a Quaker. I asked him outright, “Sitting there, in the silence, don’t you get antsy and want to move or to do something?” And he sweetly laughed and said, “Yes, and that’s the point.” The silence nor the Spirit is there to make us comfortable, in fact, it’s probably best heard when we are on the edge of our seats, wondering if we can be quiet for one more moment.

 While I am very happy to continue being a Presbyterian, I’m starting to learn the value more and more of this Quaker tradition of silence. I’m starting to infuse my days with times of brief, brief silence. Sometimes the silence is for thirty seconds, or a moment, or if I’m really daring, perhaps three minutes. But it’s someplace to begin, and that is the point. You do not rush headfirst into an hour of silence, but slowly creep along and practice. Maybe if I sit still enough, I can get past the loud sounds of society and grow closer to the Spirit who sometimes speaks in the smallest of voices.

VI. Up on a Mountain

 Elijah was waiting upon the mountaintop for direction, and I believe that we are all seeking guidance, whether that’s about something great or small. What are you waiting for? What is the question in your heart? What is the answer that you long to seek?
 It is not for me to answer, but only for the Spirit of grace and power to reveal. May you take today, and each day, as an opportunity to seek God more and more and may you trust in the Spirit, in the whisper, in the still small voice to carry you this day and always. Amen.