

"VOICES OF LENT (#6): THE VOICE OF SILENCE"

Mark 15:34-39

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[Cornerstone U.M.C.; 3-24-24]

--I--

1. Read Text: Mark 15:34-39 (as dramatic monologue of Simon of Cyrene).
2. Have you ever had the experience of walking through your house, calling out to your spouse or child (who you *know* is there)... only to be answered by a deafening SILENCE?

A--Or what about making a phone call and asking for someone, only to be hung up on because you've dialed the wrong number?

B--Growing up as a little boy, I had quite a temper (remember, I'm part Italian!).

1--And when I'd get into trouble, occasionally my punishment was to be sent to my room to cool off.

2--And I remember sometimes yelling, screaming and pounding on my door trying to get my parents' attention when I was upset, only to learn (much later, of course) that sometimes the *best* way for parents to show love is through... (you guessed it) silence!

3. Well, today we're finishing up a series called Voices of Lent, in which we've been using some of the themes of this season to talk about various ways that God sustains and empowers us in our lives today.

A--And our scripture story from Mark 15 (shared so wonderfully by _____ in his portrayal of Simon of Cyrene) invites us to consider the value and place of those times in our lives when God seems silent, and we wonder if He's even there at all.

1--In Verse 34, we heard how -- on the cross -- Jesus called out "*Eloi, Eloi, Lama Sabachthani*" which is an Aramaic phrase that is translated into English as "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken/abandoned me?*" ¹

2--And while Jesus' cry here was also part of a quote from Psalm 22, ² I believe it nevertheless also expressed how he actually *felt* there on the cross = as if he was forsaken/abandoned by God (or that God was *silent*).

B--I'm sure we've ALL experienced this feeling at some point in our life or another... perhaps when we've been sick ...Or lost a loved one ...Or been laid off from work... or been abandoned by a family member... and we wondered where God was?

C--Well, when you and I experience what I'm calling the "***Voice of Silence***" in life today, I want to suggest two things for us to do, based on Jesus' own experience:...

--II--

4. First, instead of fighting against the things or people that we think are *causing* the problem(s), we need simply to **GIVE THEM UP TO GOD!**

A--Verse 37 of today's scripture says that "*Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last.*"

1--Notice: it *doesn't* say "*he died*" or "*was killed*" but that he "*breathed his last...*"

2--There's almost a sense of *choice/free will* in the way this is worded, as if to say that Jesus' life was not so much *taken* from him, as much as He voluntarily *surrendered* and *gave it up* to God *of his own accord*.

B--Perhaps the lesson in this for us is to quit trying to struggle to take care of things *ourselves*, and instead learn to *surrender* our frustrations and pains *to God*.

1--One writer has said that "*God's best is known by surrender, not by struggle.*" ³

2--Another has said that "*[We] become stronger only when [we] become weaker. When [we] surrender [our] will to God, [we] discover the resources to do what God requires.*" ⁴

C--Remember that it was only after Jesus *surrendered* his life to death that death itself was defeated once and for all. And in the same way, often we don't *overcome* our struggles until *after* we quit trying to make sense of & "fix" them in our *own* strength ⁵

5. A second thing we learn from Jesus' experience with the "*Voice of Silence*" is that once we give our problems up to God, we must also learn to **WAIT FOR HIM TO ACT**.

A--You know, when we're in the middle of life's challenges, we sometimes may wonder if God is even there at all, and even at times be tempted to give up too quickly.

B--Yet, like Jesus did, perhaps the key to making it through the times when we don't see or hear God is for us to learn how to trust and *wait* for God's end result to take place.

1--In today's Bible story, that "waiting" takes the form of the three days between Good Friday (when Jesus died) and Easter Sunday (when He rose again). ⁶

2--To all outward appearances, when Jesus died, it seemed his story was over.

3--But just as his death on the cross wasn't the *end* but merely the *beginning* of new life for him (and for us all), we don't need to give up on God or on His purposes and plans in *our* lives, either, just because we don't see a resolution *right away* or *in the manner we want!*

C--Instead, like Jesus did, we need to trust and wait on *the Lord's* action and timing.

1--Sweeping across Germany at the end of World War II, Allied forces searched farms and houses looking for snipers.

2--And in the rubble of a basement at one abandoned house, scratched in crumbling wall, searchers found a Star of David next to these words:
*"I believe in the sun, even when it does not shine;
 I believe in love, even when it is not shown;
 I believe in God, even when he does not speak."* ⁷

3--These are words reminding us that **there are times when we can trust God to be most present precisely when He *seems* to be most absent!** [REPEAT]

D--God's "Voice of Silence," you see, is never the last word. And therefore (to repeat a famous saying), "*We should never put a period where God puts a comma!*" ⁸

--III--

6. Life, you see, is full of all kinds of challenges which -- on our less-than-good-days -- can cause us at times to question the existence, presence, or sanity of God.

A--But Jesus' own cry on the cross teaches us that we can overcome these (just as he did) when we learn to... (#1) *Give Them Up to God*; and then (#2) *Wait for God to act*.

B--Yes, it may challenge us at first, but in the end, God's "***Voice of Silence***" invites us to lift our eyes from the problems and struggles of *this* world to the One who has overcome them all.

C--In other words, it invites our spirits to join with the hymn-writer in singing...

7. [I start with ACAPELLA SOLO of first verse of "***Were You There***", then additional other soloists are added in each subsequent verse (UMH#288, all 5 verses)]

- 1) *Were you there when they crucified my Lord?...*
- 2) *Were you there when they nailed him to the tree?...*
- 3) *Were you there when they pierced him in the side?...*
- 4) *Were you there when the sun refused to shine?...*
- 5) *Were you there when they laid him in the tomb?...*

8. BENEDICTION.... In life, each and every one of us will have times when we hear and experience the "Voice of Silence" in life. But always remember that this is *not* a sign of God's *absence*, but -- just like the silence in the three days between Jesus' death and resurrection -- it's an invitation for us to *trust* and *wait* on GOD to act in HIS own timing! Go in peace in the name of the Father, Son & Holy Spirit!

ENDNOTES:

¹ We also find a form of this expression in Matthew 27:46.

² Psalm 22:2 actually says "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night, but find no rest.*"

³ Croft M. Pentz, The Complete Book of Zingers (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1990).

⁴ Erwin Lutzer, Men of Integrity, Vol. 1, no. 1. "*Faith is not a contract. Faith is surrender. If no other relationship in our experience is one of self surrender, it's all contractual; people won't know how to believe.*" [Archbishop Francis George, from his 1990 doctoral dissertation (Chicago Tribune, May 3, 1997), cited in Christianity Today, Vol. 41, no. 8]

⁵ Consider also the words to the great hymn "I Surrender All" (United Methodist Hymnal #354):
Verse 1: "All to Jesus I surrender; all to him I freely give; I will ever love and trust him, in his presence daily live. I surrender all, I surrender all, all to thee, my blessed Savior, I surrender all.
Verse 2: All to Jesus I surrender; humbly at his feet I bow, worldly pleasures all forsaken; take me, Jesus, take me now. I surrender all, I surrender all, all to thee, my blessed Savior, I surrender all.
Verse 3: All to Jesus I surrender; make me, Savior, wholly thine; let me feel the Holy Spirit, truly know that thou art mine. I surrender all, I surrender all, all to thee, my blessed Savior, I surrender all.
Verse 4: All to Jesus I surrender; Lord, I give myself to thee; fill me with thy love and power; let thy blessing fall on me. I surrender all, I surrender all, all to thee, my blessed Savior, I surrender all.
Verse 5: All to Jesus I surrender; now I feel the sacred flame. O the joy of full salvation! Glory, glory to his name! I surrender all, I surrender all, all to thee, my blessed Savior, I surrender all."

⁶ We might be tempted to say that in today's scripture, God's "action" took the form of the Temple veil being torn in two in Verse 38. But while that certainly WAS an "action" by God, it was NOT the action that overcame the source of Jesus' challenge (i.e., death).

No. That which overcame death was the power of God at work in the three days of waiting. It was three days in which God spoke most loudly through His SILENCE! I've heard it said that "*Silence is that time we have to listen to the one who has everything to tell us and nothing to learn from us*" [Spoken by Bishop Reuben Job, United Methodist Bishop at a clergy retreat]. "*Courage and faithfulness to the gospel may mean experiencing at times a silent heaven*" [Fred Craddock, John H. Hayes, Carl R. Holladay, and Gene M. Tucker, Preaching the New Common Lectionary - Year B: Lent, Holy Week, Easter (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), p. 88]. So, we NEED these times of silence to encourage and teach us what it means to "wait upon God."

⁷ Robert Schuller, cited in James S. Hewett, Illustrations Unlimited (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, 1988), p. 186.

⁸ For example: if our prayers aren't answered immediately, or things don't turn out exactly the way we want, we shouldn't give up easily on God, because He's telling us, "*Wait! I'm not through yet!*" Notice, for example, that even in Psalm 22 (which Jesus quotes the first two verses to from the cross), the *next* three verses (verses 3-5) express this same sense of trust and faith in God *in spite of* His apparent absence: "*Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel. In you our ancestors trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them. To you they cried, and were saved; in you they trusted, and were not put to shame.*"