

Old School Can Still be Cool
“1966 – The Sound of Silence”

(Biblical Text: I Kings 19:9-18)

Dr. Michael F. Gardner, Senior Pastor - Old Mission Church, Fairway, Kansas

Have you ever been on overload? Wanted to run away? Have you ever felt abandoned, even by God? Ever have a hard time finding God’s direction?

With the news about the death to suicide this week of ultra-talented comedian and actor Robin Williams, we surely need a Word from the Lord about these topics. It is ironic that one who brought laughter to so many would struggle with depression. But it was so, ***and he is not the only one.***

Depression is woven into our lives, and affects so many, maybe all of us, from time to time. It is the painful underbelly of our achievement-driven, information-saturated culture that our deepest hurts often go unexpressed, and we often suffer in silence. ***Lord, have mercy upon us.***

As one who has experienced the aftermath of death by suicide - my paternal grandfather and a close friend, another minister - my heart aches for Robin Williams’ family, and for him and for his suffering. But even in the valley of the shadow, they are not alone. Neither are we - ***even if we feel like it!***

I am constantly amazed at how music speaks to our feelings, giving expression in words and art to what lays deep within us. It was that way, in my early teens, when I heard ***“The Sound of Silence”*** for the first time.

It was a song by *Simon & Garfunkel* from 1966. But it has had a far-reaching influence well beyond the sixties. It was written in the aftermath of the 1963 assassination of John F. Kennedy. Paul Simon said that the song originally ***“wasn't something deep, or profound ... more like a teenage cry for help ... nobody's listening to me, nobody's listening to anyone ... but somehow it resonated with millions of people.”***¹ It did! And it still does today.

It still strikes a chord when we wonder if anyone cares or is listening to our pain. And as it resonated with folks in the sixties, when war raged and cities burned, it still speaks to us in our anguish over the situation in Ferguson, MO. ***We thought we were well beyond that!*** But we evidently are not.

By the end of 1965, ***“The Sound of Silence”*** was a national number one hit.

¹ Paul Simon in a 1980 interview with Terry Gross of NPR (National Public Radio.)

Some of us remember it from the radio - or from the film, *"The Graduate."* My kids know it from the 4th season of *"Arrested Development"* on TV. The song has been "covered" by lots of bands - Rock, to Jazz, to Reggae, even *"Bananarama"* – who, trust me, look **nothing** like *Simon & Garfunkel!*

And its words still speak to us! Paul Simon sang it in 2011, at the 10th anniversary memorial service for the victims of 9/11. He also sang it 2012 at the funeral of Victoria Leigh Soto, a teacher killed at Sandy Hook.

We certainly need a message from God today! ***But how does God speak?***

Well, sometimes God speaks clearly, strongly, in the imperative. Like in the voice echoed by the Biblical prophets, like Amos, ***"Thus saith the Lord!"*** - the voice Isaiah heard in the Temple, thundering, ***"Who will go for us?"***

But most of us don't get to hear that kind of voice. In the Bible, the voice of God comes in many ways. Our text today is drawn from a pivotal moment in the life of the prophet and it illustrates two of the ways God speaks.

The first, the commanding, mighty voice of God comes to Elijah twice as he hides in the cave: verses nine and thirteen. ***"What are you doing here Elijah?"***

But in between those two, in verse twelve, a second very different voice speaks.

Elijah's response to the Word of the Lord, delivered in a sort of *whine*, is so human, so like us: *"I've worked hard. I've hung in there. But your people, God, even the leaders! They've turned their back on you, they don't care. I am the only who still cares. And now they are after me. And even you don't even care."*

That's why he runs away. That's why he hides in the cave. He goes to Mount Horeb, and the text tells us in verse eleven, ***"A great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came the sound of a still small voice."***

Translators have struggled at this point in the text. **What sound is that?**

There is no direct English equivalent for the *Hebrew*. Some Bible translations just don't fall well on our ears! For example, the New American Standard translation says ***"the sound of gentle blowing."*** Unfortunate. Mmmm. The God who blows? I don't think so! And the old Catholic Douay-Rheims Bible is worse - ***"the whistling of gentle air."*** Not good at all!

I am not responsible for your inference about what that sounds like!!

The New Revised Standard takes a more spiritual, sort of Simon and Garfunkel turn, rendering it as *“the sound of sheer silence.”* Much better! But I think none have improved on the King James, and the Revised Standard that followed, which translates the voice of God as *“a still small voice.”*

Regardless of how the words are translated, nothing in the text tells us what the voice said. Maybe it is enough for us to know that however the voice spoke, and whatever it said, it was evidently what Elijah needed to hear.

It was not necessarily what he wanted to hear. I can almost imagine the conversation from my own times of running and hiding. *“What? I’m not really talking to you. And whatever you have to say, I don’t want to hear it!”*

But what Elijah heard made all the difference. He came out of the cave rather than hiding within it. Having heard the voice, he was no longer alone. He was ready to face the future with the help of God. And he discovered that seven thousand faithful of the people of God standing with him!

So does God still speak to us in our loneliest moments? Does God speak to us when we are depressed, or we despair over the state of the world, or our little corner of it? Does God still speak today at all? I think he does!

Sometimes, in order to hear the voice of God we have to turn down the volume of the world. And we live in a **noisy world**. Some of the voices we hear are loud, harsh, negative and condemning. And they are often wrong.

I believe there is a God, concerned for every person, for you and for the world. The God in whom I believe does not hate anyone. In fact God loves you. Life is not hopeless or meaningless. And the world is not going to hell in a hand basket, whatever the latest broadcast says.

I believe the voice of God, the *still small voice* is still speaking to people today. It’s message is different for each of us. But it always speaks what our hearts most need to hear.

In fact, if you’ll listen, I believe that still small voice is speaking to you today.

(Prays) **Lord, open our hearts to hear your voice.
Let my voice be your instrument.**

You are not alone...

I have not abandoned you...

I love you... I forgive you...

Turn loose of the past... Let it go.

Forgive him or her... Forgive yourself...

Life is worth living...

Your life is worthwhile...

Your life is not over...

You are not alone...

I'm here for you!

And I am with you!