

**Summerland United Church**  
**August 25**  
**All of my Days: Silence**

**Prelude**

**Welcome & Land Acknowledgement**

**Threshold** Listening for God is perhaps one of the hardest forms of prayer for us. We often think that prayer is talking to God. Silence is a rare commodity in our society but one of the greatest gifts for our spiritual lives that the Holy One gives us... time to just 'be'. We'll focus this Sunday on the practice of silence. Can we open ourselves to the simple empty spaces and open ourselves to the 'still small voice of God' with in?

**Scripture:** Psalm 46

Whether you take what is written in the bible as fact, myth metaphor or story, listen for the meaning it holds for you on this day.

- <sup>1</sup> God is our refuge and strength,  
a very present help in trouble.
- <sup>2</sup> Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change,  
though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea,  
<sup>3</sup> though its waters roar and foam,  
though the mountains tremble with its tumult. *Selah*
- <sup>4</sup> There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,  
the holy habitation of the Most High.
- <sup>5</sup> God is in the midst of the city; it shall not be moved;  
God will help it when the morning dawns.
- <sup>6</sup> The nations are in an uproar; the kingdoms totter;  
God speaks; the earth melts.
- <sup>7</sup> The Holy One is with us;  
the God of Jacob is our refuge. *Selah*
- <sup>8</sup> Come, behold the works of the Holy One;  
see what desolations have been brought on the earth.
- <sup>9</sup> God makes wars cease to the end of the earth;  
You breaks the bow and shatters the spear;  
You burns the shields with fire.

<sup>10</sup> “Be still, and know that I am God!

I am exalted among the nations;

I am exalted in the earth.”

<sup>11</sup> The Holy One is with us;

the God of Jacob is our refuge. *Selah*

Reader: (after Scripture is read) May God bless our understanding of these sacred words.

**All: Thanks be to God.**

**We Sing:** MV 77 Be still and know.

**Reflection:** As many of you know, I did my graduate research on Introverts. In particular, Introvert Clergy and their experience of leading worship. In March, I went to Halifax to present my research, the video of this presentation is on YouTube, and there is a link to it in the weekly email, if you're interested in learning more. I'm not going to go too deep into this work today, but I am going to share a bit, because one of the key themes I learned from my research is that, for introverts, there isn't enough silence in the world, or in particular in worship.

One of my participants commented on the concept of silence in worship saying, *we can treat silence the way the radio does – as dead air and oh, we're going to lose people if we don't fill it.* The participant went on to say, *really, we should see silence as sweet sacred space, an opportunity for the Holy Spirit to catch up.*

This quote, among others from my research has stuck with me, because I am an introvert, and I agree that more silence in worship would be a very good thing for us. However, I can already sense the more extroverted people in the community getting uncomfortable. And so, for me, standing up her leading worship, I live in a bit tension between wanting to provide for all the personality styles present in our community, and providing comfort for everyone. Which somehow tends to mean less silence.

We can struggle with silence, we don't always like to be alone with our own thoughts, or alone with what God might have to say to us. However, it is often in silence and solitude that we can truly come to understand what we are called to do and be in this life.

The phrase, “the still small voice of God” comes from a story in 1 Kings, when the Prophet Elijah flees to the wilderness because his prophecies had angered the powers that be. While there *he was told, “Go, stand on the mountain at attention before God. God will pass by.”*

*A hurricane wind ripped through the mountains and shattered the rocks before God, but God wasn't to be found in the wind; after the wind an earthquake, but God wasn't in the*

*earthquake; and after the earthquake fire, but God wasn't in the fire; and after the fire a gentle and quiet whisper.*

*When Elijah heard the still small voice, he muffled his face with his great cloak, went to the mouth of the cave, and stood there. A quiet voice asked, "So Elijah, now tell me, what are you doing here?"*

It is in the quiet, in the stillness after all the tumult that Elijah hears God speaking and is called back to his work. In the psalm we heard this morning, again, it is when we are still that we know God.

### The Inner Sanctuary

"There is a really deep well inside me. And in it dwells God. Sometimes I am there too. But more often, stone and grit block the well. And God is buried beneath. Then He must be dug out again (Aug 26, Tuesday evening, 1941)

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"...one must always carry a great silence within one, a silence into which one can always withdraw, even in the midst of all the hustle and bustle and in the midst of the most animated conversations."



20<sup>th</sup> Century Etty Hillesum wrote about her experience of stillness and finding God. A secular Jew living in Amsterdam at the outbreak of WWII, she writes in her journal, *there is a really deep well inside me. And in it dwells God. Sometimes I am there too. But more often stone and grit block the well. And God is buried beneath. Then he must be dug out again. (Aug 26, Tuesday Evening, 1941)*

She says in another part of her journal, *one must always carry a great silence within one, and silence into which one can always withdraw, even in the midst of the hustle and bustle and in the midst of the most animated conversations.*

I am inspired by the writings of Etty, because she found within herself a fortitude and gave her inner strength during a horrific time in Europe. She would refuse friends offers to go into hiding, and instead went by train to Auschwitz concentration camp and was murdered there on Nov 30, 1943. She was 29 years old.

Etty didn't live with the notion of what we might call toxic positivity, she was not always joyful or smiling. However, she did live with a fierce compassion for humanity, and it was from that compassion that she found the ability to face both the beauty and horror of the world around her. She gave space to sorrow and grieved the brutal extermination of her people. From her, I think we can learn that we all live in a world mixed with tragedy and joy. Sometimes, the balance of these two things is dipped towards more than the other.

As we move closer to our moving date, and the date when we will need to say goodbye to this building as we know it, we will enter a time of sorrow and grief, we are perhaps, already there. And we should grieve this loss, as we have grieved other losses in our lives. It is healthy to give ourselves the permission to feel sorrow and sadness.

It is during these times of grief that we often feel alone. When the silence of the fog of our grief is deafening, everything and everyone can feel desperately far away, especially God or any sense of comfort.

But, as we've heard from the Prophet Elijah, the writer of Psalms and Etty Hillesum, it is in these times when we are called to drop down gentle into that deep inner well, retreat to the cave of refuge that is the still small voice of God. A place within ourselves where God dwells and where we too can enter into silence. Even amidst the hustle and bustle of the world around us.

For the last two weeks I've suggested a single word for our – pause prayers – a simple prayer to accompany our prayer bracelets. We've had the words – Thank you and love. This week I'm going to invite you to use the word silence, or quiet.

And to help us get there, I have a short meditative prayer I would like to share with you now. Get comfortable in your seat, close your eyes if you'd like, take some deep breaths and perhaps put a finger or two on your prayer beads.

God help me to relax. Take from me the tension that makes peace impossible.  
Take from me the fears that do not allow me to venture. Take from me the  
worries  
that blind my sight. Take from me the distress that hides your joy.

Help me to know that I am with you, that I am in your care, that I am in your love,  
that you and I are one.

When you are ready, take another breath and open your eyes.