

I've had two conversations today with different people who mentioned 2019 as "the good old days". Given the turmoil of 2019, this is a pretty unfortunate reality. 2020 has been a year of hardships, fear, danger, and grief. Beginning with an assassination that could easily have led to WWII and then continuing with the Australian fires that burned tens of millions of acres and killed billions of animals, it soon rolled downhill from there. A presidential impeachment trial, a global pandemic that closed the world for months, a financial recession, the withdrawal of the UK from the EU, continuing but amplifying racial injustice leading to rioting and protests worldwide, and an absolute distrust of almost any system has defined 2020 so far, and we're not quite half way through. Personally, I add to that trying to lead a church through an unprecedented crisis, preparing to lose my mother to cancer, and walking with over 20 people in our congregation who have lost either parents or grandparents the past 6 months. "Chaos" doesn't begin to name it. The noise of this world echoes in our ears and our hearts, deafening us and deadening us to the subtleties of life. This includes God's "still, small voice". So now more than ever we must recapture the spiritual discipline of Silence. We have to find places, inside or outside, where we can shut down the news, turn off (yes OFF) our phones and computers, and turn our ears and eyes inward for a while. Silence is a type of prayer, a realignment of our spirits with God's Spirit.

At the risk of spiritual exhibitionism, I want to share my personal journey with silence in 2020, not as a cautionary tale, but certainly not as a model. This is dangerous as a pastor, but I think it is still the right thing to do. You see, I have not followed my own spiritual advice given over the past 20 years while I've lived with you in COVIDland. I have not taken time every day to simply sit with God, not as a Pharisaical discipline but as part of the Christian life. When I get a break, I tend to fill it with noise, both audible and visual, with things like TV, movies, news, books, games... seldom since last March have I just sat in silence with God. Until today.

Today I finally took a walk to a local lake (well, retention pond but close enough), sat on a manhole cover that doubles as a seat, closed my eyes, and did nothing. I didn't want to pray through a scripture or do a prayer practice. I didn't want to think deep thoughts or plan for the future. I just wanted to sit with God in silence, like two old friends on a park bench. So I did. But I couldn't keep my eyes closed. They kept opening of their own accord. I have enough prayer experience to know what this is, so I opened my eyes again and looked around. With the lack of rain, the pond is really low, revealing the muddy banks, the garbage that has been thrown carelessly in, and the dead branches fallen from nearby trees. It was an ugly sight. And I immediately got the message. This was my spiritual Well, the reservoir of my spiritual energy, and it was darn near empty. Yup, that just about sums it up. With all that is happening and all the needs surrounding us, my spiritual reservoir is just about out. Its ugly, and for the things living in the water its a bit dangerous. I need a good rain to fill it back up - a good long season with God to replenish the Well.

Maybe it's scary to think that your pastor is dry right now. "But if he's dry, and he's supposed to fill us up, what do we do?" Well, you learn with me. You learn that it's not my job or my calling to fill you up. It's my job and calling to point and lead you to the One who fills us all up. And that's what I'm trying to do with all my might; to lead you to Jesus, every day, so He can fill you up, and me up, and all of us up. Because when our spiritual wells are full, they overflow and spill out onto others. That's how this works.

So please, for God's sake and yours, take some time every day to just practice the discipline of silence with God. Find a spot without distractions and just sit and listen to God's silence. And He will fill your Well, and then you can share it with others.

Questions to ponder:

Where is a spot you can go to daily and be quiet with God? Is it maybe a time of day instead?

How's your spiritual well? Full? Empty? Draining fast? Stagnant?

Ask God right now for the discipline tomorrow to practice Godly Silence.