

# Coach House Church

# BEACONS

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## SILENCE

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24TH FEBRUARY 2021

In my normal working week, I would spend an afternoon in an audiology clinic, supporting the clinical audiologist. I would sometimes be the tester and sometimes lead the play activity- putting the man in the boat or the peg in the board while the pupil was being tested, supporting them to maintain their attention so they could respond consistently to the quiet beeps they were listening to through the headphones. Carrying out a listening assessment requires a soundproofed room. It is a strange sensation when you first sit in one of these anechoic spaces, with no echo, where sound is quickly absorbed. The silence feels heavy and the slightest sound such as a rumbling stomach is highlighted! This level of background silence is necessary but takes some getting used to. Many a parent has fallen asleep during the session as they relax in the quietness. The snoring does cause a problem though!

So, there are times when silence is necessary and sometimes it is a welcome relief, a time to relax in the calmness. Some people appreciate it as a space in a busy life, an oasis of calm. Others find silence overwhelming as it highlights their own thoughts, their own position of isolation. During this past year, some will say it has been good to enjoy the quietness, without the continual traffic noise or planes landing into Manchester. Earlier this year, certainly, the bird seems to sing louder as normal daily life paused. So how do you feel about silence?

The gap between the Old and New testaments of the bible is referred to as the 400 years of silence as the bible does not directly record events for that time. However, further historical texts provide more detail. The notes in my bible tell me that the people of Israel went through great change, living under six different governments which influenced their thinking, their language and their culture. While not every event was a positive one for Israel, the bigger picture indicates that both the Greek and Roman empires both played a big part in Jewish history, linking Israel to the wider Western world. The point is that

events continue even if we are unaware of what is happening in the background. This is born out later in Acts, where we see Paul and others travel across the Mediterranean to spread the news of Christianity. That old saying 'what have the Romans ever done for us?' is answered by 'building good transport links' allowing the Christian message to spread from the tiny land of Israel to the wider world.

And of course the 400 years of silence is broken by the announcement and arrival of Jesus. What a way to break the silence as it says in Luke 2:13 with the armies of heaven – praising God and saying "Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased."

There are other examples in the bible where we can see the impact of silence.

Silence indicates authority:

One evening, Jesus and his disciples sailed over the lake when a huge storm appeared with such ferocity that the hardy fishermen were worried. They became even more agitated because Jesus was resting peacefully in the middle of this alarming scene. Mark 4:39 says

39 When Jesus woke up, he rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Silence! Be still!" Suddenly the wind stopped, and there was a great calm. 40 Then he asked them, "Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?"

For the disciples, the silence which then fell across the lake was a relief and Jesus' own words displayed his power and authority even over creation.

Silence represents despair:

Psalm 35 is one of the psalms of lament and the tone indicates that this was not done quietly as he cries out to God. The lament psalms were written as a way of grieving and subsequent healing as they looked to God for comfort in their sorrowful circumstances. David, the writer, had enemies who set out to kill him as he was pursued by King Saul and in verse 3 he calls out to God: Let me hear you say, "I will give you victory!" His main concern is that he wants a response now. In verse 22 he shouts out O Lord, you know all about this.

Do not stay silent.

Do not abandon me now, O Lord.

23 Wake up! Rise to my defense!

The psalms are a good reminder that it is good to be real with God. God will not be put off by our honesty. Even David, who is recognised as the great King of Israel, endured extreme situations that many of us will never be faced with

and yet he knew that his only hope was in calling out to Almighty God. He expected God to intervene and answer his prayers.

Silence displays strength:

The prophet Isaiah spoke about the coming Messiah, hundreds of years before Jesus' birth. A well known passage in Isaiah 53 speaks of what would happen to Jesus, and in verse 7 describes how his silence was used to show strength and purpose:

He was oppressed and treated harshly,  
yet he never said a word.  
He was led like a lamb to the slaughter.  
And as a sheep is silent before the shearers,  
he did not open his mouth.

Jesus chose not to speak out, to remonstrate with his captors or to defend his position as the Son of God. He chose to be sacrificed as he knew this was God's plan for humanity and the only way to reconnect us to a Holy God, to pay the price for our failings and allow us to enter heaven.

Silence comes before victory:

In the well-known recount, Joshua and the people of Israel have a battle plan to conquer Jericho. But it is a strange way to plan an assault as it says in Joshua 6:

10 "Do not shout; do not even talk," Joshua commanded. "Not a single word from any of you until I tell you to shout. Then shout!"

The people of Jericho must have been wondering what on earth was happening as troops of people walked the circuit of the city walls in silence for 6 days. Little did they know the impact this would have, as they followed the plan to the letter and God intervened and gave them victory.

The ultimate example of silence before victory is retold in the new testament and is the central message of the bible. On Good Friday, Jesus was crucified and then buried in a borrowed tomb. As the following day was the Sabbath, no one could visit the tomb or mourn nearby. So there was silence. The disciples were hidden away in despair, their whole world was in turmoil from the events of the last week of Jesus' life. Luke 24 says:

24 But very early on Sunday morning<sup>[a]</sup> the women went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. 2 They found that the stone had been rolled away from the entrance. 3 So they went in, but they didn't find the body of the

Lord Jesus. 4 As they stood there puzzled, two men suddenly appeared to them, clothed in dazzling robes.

5 The women were terrified and bowed with their faces to the ground. Then the men asked, "Why are you looking among the dead for someone who is alive? 6 He isn't here! He is risen from the dead! Remember what he told you back in Galilee, 7 that the Son of Man[b] must be betrayed into the hands of sinful men and be crucified, and that he would rise again on the third day."

8 Then they remembered that he had said this. 9 So they rushed back from the tomb to tell his eleven disciples—and everyone else—what had happened.

The absence of sound does not mean the absence of activity. God is always listening to our prayers and Jesus showed us that actions often speak louder than words. Silence is powerful.



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