

“Silence Before the Storm”
Mark 11:11
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The silence of God can be disturbing.

Songs and movies and books - - have been written about - - the silence of God.

And still - - it's no less disturbing.

In his classic novel “Silence” Shusaku Endo wrestled with the nature of God.

Scorsese made it into a movie decades later.

A character in that novel has this to say:

“What do I want to say? I myself do not quite understand”

“Only that today, when for the glory of God - - Mokichi suffered and died - - I cannot bear - - the monotonous sound of the dark sea gnawing at the shore. / Behind the depressing silence of the sea - - the silence of God - - the feeling that while men raise their voices in anguish - - God remains with folded arms - - silent.”

The novel wrestles with that - - until it ends - - with this:

“I was not silent. / I suffered beside you”

It's an answer.

But even if that's the best answer there is - - it's still disturbing.

Maybe that's because - - silence - - by its very nature - - does not give many answers.

When someone is silent - - what are they thinking?

Are they angry - - bored - - or stunned?

Sometimes it's hard to tell.

Silence can be the thing we all long for - - some peace and solitude - - in a noisy world.

Silence can also be - - deafening - - and scary - - in a world of isolation.

So when God seems to be silent - - it usually makes us search for answers.

We prefer to - - UN-disturb ourselves.

Or at least to understand.

On the other hand - - sometimes silence IS the best response:

Anyone ever know someone to say something awkward after a tragedy or a death?

Anyone ever know someone to over-explain what could have been a funny joke?

Sometimes a lesson from the book of Job would help. / After Job suffers tragedy his friends appear - - and before they all ask impertinent and disturbing questions - - they sit in silence. / It lasts for seven days.

Those seven days of silence are some of the most brilliant moments in the Bible.

The whole thing is described in one verse at the end of chapter two.

One verse to describe seven days.

Because what is there to say?

Sometimes silence is the best response.

Maybe sometimes silence - - speaks.

As the novel suggests - - Jesus says:

“I was not silent - - I suffered beside you”

God - - out of the silence - - sent Jesus - - who suffered.

Maybe that - - is the best we can hope for.

And if we take that as our “answer” for now - - to the question of the silence of God...

...then it is interesting that on the eve of his suffering - - Jesus was silent too.

It is reported in Mark chapter 11 - - verse 11.

One verse of Mark - - to describe a silent Jesus.

The scene is the Temple.

The great parade has just ended. / Lots of noise and the waving of palms had greeted Jesus - - riding into Jerusalem on a donkey. / “Hosanna!”

The crowd that greeted Jesus saw him as the fulfillment of King David.

They have just shouted that in verse 10 at the top of their lungs.

But Jesus already knows that their expectations will need to be - - revised.

He is not going to take over the throne or rule the Temple.

In fact the next time Jesus would enter the temple he would make a LOT of noise.

In verse 15 Mark describes Jesus driving the money changers out of the Temple.

But before that noise - - and after the noise of the parade - - Jesus is silent.

It is a moment of silence - - a calm - - before the coming storm.

Have you ever experienced a silent calm before a storm?

Most people who do already know - - a storm is coming. / Anyone who has ever lived in tornado country knows about the strange calm before storms on the plains of the mid-west.

This moment in Mark’s gospel is Jesus’ calm - - before the storm.

Mark is the only one to describe this.

None of the other gospels describe this moment.

Just a moment of silence - - contemplating - - what is to come.

Tomorrow the Temple would be a noisy place of conflict.

Then the last supper...

Then the cross...

It is interesting that just after this it says that Jesus was hungry - - for figs!

The next time FIGS come up is on chapter 13 - - called the little apocalypse.

They are some of the most shocking verses - - about the end of the world.

The closest thing to the book of Revelation outside of the book of Revelation!

Again they are only in Mark's gospel.

So suffice it to say - - there's a lot of noise coming.

Noise and conflict.

Suffering for the sake of what is right and true.

A storm - - of justice.

But in this moment of mercy - - just before all that - - Jesus is silent.

Verse 11 - - of Mark chapter 11 - - says that after the noise of the parade...

Jesus went into the temple and looked around.

He didn't say anything - - because he was alone.

A moment of silence.

A calm before the storm.

And since it was already late - - Mark tells us - - he went home for a rest.

Tomorrow was another day.

Maybe all of this is just reported by Mark as a way of emphasizing what was coming.

Maybe it is dramatic flair.

A good story teller - - making something of a good detail.

But maybe there is more for those with ears to hear.

Listen - - to that silence...

What do you hear?

What is it telling you?

Maybe in that silence of Jesus - - is a kind of answer to the silence of God.

Jesus may end up dying on a cross - - but...

Jesus may not be the kind of Davidic Messiah that people expected - - but...

Jesus may stand SILENT before Pontius Pilate at this trial - - but...

But - - there is MORE to come!

Think of your own life now.

You may be facing some kind of defeat.

You may feel weighed down by illness.

You may be in grief over a loss.

You may be disappointed.

You may - - - but!

You may think something feels like the end of the world.

It may be pretty bad - - but - - there IS more to come.

That's what faith tells us.

It might seem like God is silent.

It might seem like God doesn't listen to your prayers.

But instead of silent - - maybe God is suffering beside you.

That is the center of who Jesus is.

That is at the center - - of Jesus silence.

We might want Jesus to stand up and fight - - but Jesus shows us a different way.

It's the kind of way Emily Dickinson points to.

"To fight aloud - - is very brave - - " she writes.

To fight aloud - - is very brave - - - - but...

Sometimes there is an even BRAVER way - - the way of silence.

She tells it this way:

“To fight aloud - - is very brave - -

But - - gallanter,

I know who charge within the bosom, the Cavalry of Woe.

Who win and nations do not see - -

Who fall - - and none observe - -

Whose dying eyes - - NO country regards with patriot love.

We trust in plumed procession - -

- - for such the angels go - -

- - rank after rank - - with even feet - -

- - and Uniforms of Snow.”

Sometimes - - as Emily Dickinson reminds us - - there are silent heroes.

Sometimes silence speaks louder than noise.

And maybe even if God does seem silent - - we can speak of God.

The last words of the novel “Silence” suggest as much:

“Even if he had been silent - -

- - my life until this day - - would have spoken of him.”

May it be so - - for you and for me.

Amen