

Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30 N.T. 11 (NRSV)

¹⁶“But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to one another,

¹⁷‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn.’

¹⁸For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon’; ¹⁹the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.”

...

²⁵At that time Jesus said, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; ²⁶yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. ²⁷All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

²⁸“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

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“Ahh, Peace & Quiet”

Opening Prayer: Please bow with me in prayer. Almighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace, we who have ears, want to hear—to hear your Word of hope, to hear your Word of wisdom, to hear your Word of love. Holy God open our ears and allow us to hear your still small voice today, **Amen.**

Introduction: **This is the** Fourth of July weekend. It’s a time when millions of people are looking to get away and spend some quality time with family and friends. People have longed to escape the hectic demands of their lives, of school, of their job. **You just wanna escape** into the great outdoors. **You just wanna go swimming** in the lake. **You just wanna go** hiking up in the mountains. **You just wanna catch** some rays on the beach. **You just wanna get away** from this noisy world and get a little of old-fashioned peace and quiet.

Sounds are constantly bombarding us. **The sounds** of traffic, the **sounds of** crowds passing by, the **sounds of the music** blaring through the ear buds of our iPhones. How many of you prefer to have the TV blaring in the background when you try to sleep at night? How many of you prefer to have the radio playing whenever you’re driving? How many of you prefer to listen to some tunes when you’re jogging through town? Of our five senses, I think it’s **the sense of sound** that has more to do with our moods than any of the others. **It’s amazing what just a half minute** of sound can do to change your mood. To help you see what I’m saying I’m going to play three different half-minute sounds, and after each one, we’ll pause so you can tell me how it makes you feel. It might help if you close your eyes while you listen to each sound. Ok, here’s our first sound:

{Play “*Delirium Silence 30 Sec. mp3*”}

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How would you describe that sound? (Techno, fast paced, hard driving.) And how did that sound make you feel? (**Energized**, like dancing, edgy, hyper.) It's amazing what a half-minute of sound can do.

Now here's the second sound. Once again, you may wanna to close your eyes:

{Play "*House of Leaves 30 Sec.mp3*"}

How would you describe that sound? (Horror movie, psycho.) And how did that sound make you feel? (**Scared**, apprehensive, like something's about to get you.) Yes, a half-minute of sound can totally change your mood.

Ok, now, close your eyes again for our third and final half-minute of sound:

{Play "*Sound of Rain 30 Sec.mp3*"}

What was that sound? (Rain, thunderstorm.) And how does that sound make you feel? (**Like you need to pee**, calm, peaceful, sleepy.)

I think by now you'll all agree that nothing affects your mood more than your sense of hearing. Sound can pick you up, it can make you scared, and it can calm you down. Yes, our sense of sound has a big influence on our mood.

PAUSE

Move I.

We live in an increasingly noisy world. Everywhere we go, we hear all kinds of sounds. While some sounds are sweet and melodious, many sounds are loud and obnoxious. In fact, the world has become such a noisy place that it's increasingly difficult to hear ourselves think. Oh, **how we all long** for some old-fashioned peace and quiet.

This past week, as I sat in the living room of the parsonage, I heard many different sounds. We live in a quiet neighborhood, and yet **I heard** an occasional car or truck outside. **I also heard** the sound of water rushing through the pipes to the upstairs bath, and the floor creaking as Donna walked around on the second floor. **I heard** the clunk of metal bats and kids practiced baseball in the field out behind the house. **I heard** one of the neighbors cutting their grass. **I heard** the birds chirping and an occasional airplane flying overhead. Oh, and who could miss the **regional jet's thrust reverses as it landed at Erie International Airport which is about a mile away**. And of course, I heard all of these sounds while sitting alone in a room that most people would describe as being quiet. You see I'm one of those people who are easily distracted. In fact, to help myself concentrate, **I sometimes** put on earmuffs to deaden the sounds. I bought those when I was going to seminary so I could concentrate on reading all of those boring theology books. I know wearing earmuffs is antisocial, but there're times it's the only way I can hear myself think. **I too**, long for old-fashioned peace and quiet.

Now, I'm sure you all know that this sermon isn't really about distracting sounds entering our ears. Although it's true, more background noises than ever are constantly bombarding our ears. That's not what this sermon is about. Rather, I'm using that physical noise as an analogy for **spiritual noise** that distracts our thoughts and sickens our souls. Oh, **how we all long** for some inner peace. Oh, how we all long for that place of quiet rest near to the heart of God.

Our Bible lesson today from Gospel of Matthew has Jesus lamenting about all of those noises that distract people from walking with God in the here and now. Jesus witnessed people who jump from one pleasure to another and from one teaching to another. They do whatever suits their fancy with little regard for the coming Kingdom of God. It's enough to break a Savior's heart. It's a laissez-faire world.

That was 2000 years ago, and if anything, I think you would agree we me that things have only gotten worse. **In this age of instant messaging**, the noise has only gotten louder. People post rambling half-baked thoughts on Facebook and in an instant, friends around the world receive the unfiltered, unedited, unadulterated drivel. Back in 1994, when the Internet was first beginning to explode, I posted this rhetorical question on my very own first home page, **"The World Wide Web brings the power of the press to the powerless. The question is what will "we" do with it?"** Well, that was 26 years ago, and today we can see that while the **Internet** has made information more accessible, that more has meant more of absolutely everything, be it good, bad, or **even downright ugly**. It's noisier than ever. There's no distinction between fact and opinion.

This is exactly what Jesus was talking about in our Bible Lesson today here in Matthew 11. In **Matthew 11:19b (NRSV)** Jesus says, **"Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds."** Wisdom is never just the recitation of holy words, but is always truthful words accompanied by pure actions. Once again, **Eugene Peterson** manages to paraphrase this verse in an eye-opening way. **"Opinion polls don't count for much, do they? The proof of the pudding is in the eating."** In this noisy world, you don't only need to listen to what people say; you also need to observe what they do. **Yes, we really do live in an increasingly noisy world.**

End I.

Move II.

And yet many people find silence maddening. In broadcast media, they call it **dead air**. Nothing is worse than having your broadcast go silent. Heaven help us if we left people alone with their own thoughts, even for just for a few second. So, we scramble to fill the silence with something, anything. We are so afraid of dead air, that years ago we **began piping music into elevators**. And when one of those big faceless corporation's 800-numbers **puts you on hold**, they play music while you wait, interrupted every 15-seconds or so by a polite sounding recorded voice telling you that your call is really import to them. Oh, how we dread the silence.

Have you ever noticed that when someone announces that we're going to pause for a moment of silence, that that moment can seem like an eternity? Psychologists tell us that the average person's single-focused **attention span is eight seconds**. That means that on average most people can think about a single thing for no longer than eight seconds, before some other stray thought distracts them. Now most people will quickly regain their focus back to the original purpose, but they were distracted, even if only for a split second. Now days, most moments of silence don't last much longer than 15 seconds tops. And a whole minute of silence, that would seem like an eternity. We honestly don't seem to know what to do with silence.

As I was doing some researching into the concept of silence, I ran across one example of a highly effective use of silence. That's amazing all in itself, but what was even more amazing was that it happened during an **acceptance speech at the Emmys**. The academy was recognizing **Fred Rogers** for a lifetime of achievement in the field of children's television. Let's listen to a clip of Mr. Rogers' now famous acceptance speech:

{Play "*Fred Rogers Emmy Acceptance Speech.wmv*." [1:33]}

In those 10 seconds of silence, people all over the auditorium recalled to their memories important people who influenced their own lives. **And many tears came to people's eyes.** That's the power of silence. Silence has the power to overcome the noise and heal people's lives.

I don't know if you caught it, but Fred Rogers concluded his acceptance speech in a way you don't hear all that often. In public speeches, many people, particularly politicians, will conclude by saying "*God bless you.*" But what Mr. Roger said was, "***May God be with you.***" Who says words like that? Who says, "*May God be with you?*" Yes, pastors. And even though you might not have known it, Fred Rogers was a pastor. He was an alumnus of the same seminary as me, **Pittsburgh Theological**. And in 1963, the Presbyterian Church ordained Fred Rogers to children's ministry. Fred Rogers used silence effectively because Fred Rogers knew God's favorite place is in the silence. **And yet, many people continue find silence maddening.**

End II.

Move III.

But God comes to us not in the noise, but in the silence. Contrary to the images portrayed in the movies, **God doesn't speak** to people in a thunderous voice from on top of a mountain. God speaks to people in the silent moments in life—in the **gentle whisper**, in the still small voice.

Rob Bell, the hipster pastor who founded the Mars Hill mega-church in 1999 outside Chicago, did one of the *best videos* on God speaking in the silence I've ever seen. You can watch the whole 10-minute video on *YouTube*. Just search for "**Rob Bell Noise**" on *YouTube*.

Bell used the Old Testament story of when the Prophet Elijah was at the point of despair and ready to give up on life. Elijah had been preaching the message God had given him, but the people were angry and were threatening to kill him. Elijah had reached the end of his rope. That's when God tells Elijah to go up on the mountain, because God's going to meet him there. Let's pick up the story in **1 Kings 19:11b-13a (NRSV)**. "**Now there was a great wind, so strong it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantel and went out and stood at the entrance to the cave.**" Elijah heard God not in the wind, or the earthquake, or the fire, but in the *sheer silence*. Other translators call it the "*still small voice*," or the "*gentle whisper*," but the best sense of the Hebrew is "*the sound of sheer silence*." The silence may well frighten us. **But God comes not in the noise, but always in the silence.**

End III.

Conclusion: Before going today, let's take some time to listen for God in the silence. We began this message with three half-minute clips of differing sounds. Those sounds lifted you up, made you scared, and calmed you down. Now we're gonna end with a **minute-and-a-half of silence** so we can hear God. Get comfortable. Sit up straight, place your feet flat on the floor, and lay your hands palms up in your lap. Finally, close your eyes, take a deep breathe, and slowly let it out. To help you stay focused, I'm gonna read six Bible verses at quarter-minute intervals. Then, in the intervening silence, listen for God's voice. Ok, here we go:



1:30 *"But Jesus often withdrew into lonely places and prayed."* —Luke 5:16

1:15 *"Be still and know that I am God."* —Psalm 46:10a

1:00 *"The Lord is in his holy temple, let all the earth be silent before him."*
—Habakkuk 2:20

0:45 *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."* —Matthew 11:28

0:30 *"Be silent, O Israel, and listen! You have now become the people of the LORD your God."* —Deuteronomy 27:9

0:15 *"Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him."* —Psalm 37:7

0:00 *"Ahh, finally some Peace & Quiet."*

Closing prayer: Let's pray. O God, you do indeed come to us in the silence. In this world so full of noise, allow us to come away and hear your voice. Give us strength for the journey, hope for the future, and purpose for our lives. **Amen**

Communion: See Insert and on the screen.

10:30 Closing Hymn: "What a Friend We Have in Jesus" Hymn No. 526

All Three Verses

Sending Forth: Are you weary? Are your burdens getting you down? Then come and be with Jesus today. We all could use more peace and quiet in our lives. Go forth, listening for God, not in the noise, but in the silence. **And all of God's people said...Amen!**