

**“Living in the ‘World of Me’”  
 “Silence or Violence?  
 The Gift of Silence”**

**Ecclesiastes 3:1,7  
 2/21/10**

**To truly live as Christ, there are times we must keep silent for the sake of others. The only problem? It’s inconvenient.**

We are at the final week of our sermon series, “Living in the world of me.” We have heard about self-control and the blessing it really becomes to us and others. We heard last week about who we listen to in life and our need to listen to God’s voice first and above all else.

This morning the message really hits on something that can sometimes be the greatest gift we give to others—silence.

I read a great article from *JoJo Tabares* about when to keep silent, and so it inspired me to expand on this important message this morning.

Because as I thought about it, I realized that we hear so much about what to say or what not to say or when to say it. We hear so much about the power of words. And there is no doubt that words have tremendous power to build up or tear down.

But there is another facet to that, and that is the power of silence. There are times when it is best not to say anything at all. But how difficult that can be!

I am a person that likes to talk. I know, what a shocker! I’d say that’s true for most of us preachers.

20-some years ago when I was in the youth group at my home church, we had a winter weekend district youth retreat at our camp, Camp Swatara in PA. I always loved the retreats—meeting lots of new friends and being a part of the group sessions when they typically had someone good to come in a lead discussion for us. This weekend it was Andy Murray. I loved it because I always had something to say. I was never without an opinion.

Well, this particular weekend was much like it looks outside here this morning—cold and a whole lot of snow. Saturday morning came and I was up early. I took a shower and with my wet head decided to go for a hike in the 3 feet of snow that was on the ground. I knew the trails very well, so it was nice to go out into the silence of the morning, just me and God and the huge buck that I scared out from under a pine tree that almost ran me down. It was a good day.

Sunday morning came—time to gather together for our final group session. I was excited because there was a lot I wanted to say. I woke up, ready to go. I opened my mouth to greet my friends and...nothing. My voice was absolutely gone. I mean, I could barely whisper.

So there I sat, the leader teaching, inviting our conversation, and I could do nothing. I started elbowing my friend, Wayne, next to me, whispering in his ear what I wanted to say. He became my voice. And then after a few times Wayne got sick of it and told me to speak for myself. But I could not. It was hopeless.

And I learned a valuable lesson that day: Silence. Sometimes it is better to stay quiet and let someone else share. Sometimes it is better to stay quiet and not have to try and control the situation. Sometimes by speaking, I am doing damage to someone else, just for the sake of getting my opinion out there.

**There is power in what we say, but even more power at times in what we do not say...the gift of silence.**

They say silence is golden. Your mother probably told you that if you didn't have anything nice to say, you shouldn't say anything at all. Benjamin Franklin said, "Remember not only to say the right thing in the right place, but far more difficult still, to leave unsaid the wrong thing at the tempting moment."

Ecclesiastes 3:1,7 says, "*To everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven... a time to keep silence, and a time to speak.*"

The Lord shares with us that there is a time to speak up, but there is also a time to be silent. These times occur more often than you might think! There are four main reasons to "keep silence."

**We are called to silence when we might hurt someone's feelings.**

Some things must be said, but other things only serve to anger, inflame, upset, or frustrate others. Ask yourself if there is a higher purpose to the words you plan to utter. If not, it is quite possible that you would be most eloquent in silence. Remember that not every comment requires a response! Some things are better left unsaid.

Psalm 141:3 says, "*Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips.*"

In his book *Sabbath Time*, Tilden Edwards tells about a family with teenage children who decided, as part of their Sabbath commitments, that they would not criticize each other on Sundays.

As the months went on and they kept this commitment, they realized more and more of their children's friends were coming over on Sundays just to hang around. No one in the family had talked about this commitment, but somehow other teenagers knew this home was a good place to be.

I don't know how many times I have heard someone say, "I was just telling the truth." Yes, but how and for what reason? For whose benefit? Not everything requires a response.

Now listen, this is not the "silent treatment" we are talking about. That's a whole different thing. You know what I mean...

A married couple had a quarrel and ended up giving each other the silent treatment. A week into their mute argument, the man realized he needed his wife's help. In order to catch a flight to Chicago for a business meeting, he had to get up at 5 a.m.

Not wanting to be the first to break the silence, he wrote on a piece of paper, "Please wake me at 5 a.m."

The next morning the man woke up only to discover his wife was already out of bed, it was 9 a.m., and his flight had long since departed. He was about to find his wife and demand an answer for her failings when he noticed a piece of paper by the bed.

He read, "It's 5 a.m. Wake up." *Van Morris, Mt. Washington, Kentucky*

No, this is not about the "silent treatment." This is about giving the gift of silence to others, when not speaking in the moment will do greater good.

Well, sometimes we need to keep silent because we simply do not truly know what we are talking about.

**We are called to silence when all the facts are not yet in.**

Oh man, how difficult this one is! It is a human foible that we love to seem as if we know things. Sharing information with the "Know Nots" somehow makes us feel privileged. Occasionally we find that what we *know* isn't truth at all. That's why Snopes.com is so popular. If you have only part of the story, one side of the issue, or have not corroborated your facts, God may be calling you to silence to keep you from unwittingly speaking gossip or deceit.

Three preachers were on a non-productive fishing trip when they began to discuss various topics to pass the time. One preacher said he thought it would be nice if they confessed their biggest sins to each other and then prayed for each other. They all agreed, and the first preacher said that his biggest sin was that he liked to sit at the beach now and then and watch pretty women stroll by.

The second preacher confessed that his biggest sin was that he went to the horse racing track every so often and put a small bet on a horse.

Turning to the third preacher, they asked, "Brother, what is your biggest sin?"

With a grin, he said, "My biggest sin is gossiping."

*Submitted by Van Morris, Mount Washington, Kentucky*

Psalm 34:13 reminds us to "*Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit.*"

Yes, we like to feel privileged in knowing stuff others don't. But better to be silent and not venture down a road that only leads to hurt, for others and for ourselves.

Abraham Lincoln once said, "Tis better to be thought a fool, than open one's mouth and remove all doubt."

**We are called to silence when we have nothing of value to say.**

Proverbs 18:2 says, "*A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing personal opinion.*"

Having nothing to say often doesn't stop us from speaking. Engaging in mindless, filler speech almost invites "Foot in Mouth Disease." Having nothing of value to say can be a sign that we should be listening to what others have to say. The Lord puts others in our midst for many reasons, and one of them is so that they might teach and minister to *us*. It's difficult to hear the wisdom of God speaking through others when our mouths are fully engaged in folly.

There's a saying: "The mind is like a TV set—when it goes blank, it's a good idea to turn off the sound."

**We are called to silence when we would be speaking out of anger.**

When we are angry, there is the danger that we would say things we might later regret, things others may find difficult to forgive. We can cause others to stumble, cut to the heart of a friend, and destroy a precious relationship with the words we use. Don't respond when you are still angry. Give it a few hours or days, if you can, in order to respond out of love instead of in anger. Read over your email. Think over your response before you make that call and, most importantly, pray over it.

Proverbs 18:19 says, "*A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city: and their contentions are like the bars of a castle.*"

James 1:19 says, "*Be quick to listen and slow to speak, slow to anger.*"

Norm Evans, all-pro tackle for the Miami Dolphins for several years, once confided, "It's really dangerous for a pro football player to get angry. In fact, that's when linemen sustain their most serious injuries."

He explained, "Anger is so harmful in football that if I can get an opposing lineman or end angry at me, he will concentrate on beating me and forget to attack the quarterback—and that's my job, protecting the quarterback."

Mike Fuller, fleet-footed safety and punt-return specialist for the San Diego Chargers in the late 1970s, agreed. "The wide receivers are continually trying to make us angry each time they come into our area, because they know if they can upset us emotionally, they can fool us on the next play."

When we react out of anger with our words, we will wound those we love, overreact, and do things that calmness of thought would not otherwise permit.

*Adapted from Tim LaHaye and Bob Phillips, *Anger Is a Choice* (Zondervan, 2002), pp. 19-20*

Silence can be a precious gift we give others. Some things are simply better left unsaid.

**Sometimes the most effective, kind, and loving thing to say is nothing at all!**

Today is the first Sunday in Lent. This past Wednesday was Ash Wednesday, which leads us into our 40 day journey to Holy Week, preparing our hearts for remembering what Jesus did on the cross and God's final answer of "Yes!" to life through Jesus' resurrection.

And so, as we think about giving to others through our silence, we know we are not the first. God gave to us life in Christ, and it is His perfect example which we follow.

Jesus' power on the cross was in what He did not do.

**Read Matthew 27:39-44**

Jesus did not speak; He was silent. He did not get down. It was for the greater good that Jesus did what He did.

Because rather than protect Himself, or prove Himself right, or accuse everyone around Him of terrible acts of violence, Jesus chose silence. He chose the greater good. He chose the victory of life, rather than the satisfaction of one moment in time.

Some things are better left unsaid. Amen.

Call to Worship (We're here together with God and one another—to be present with one another—not forcing it with what we do or what we say

“When Jesus was confronted with the woman caught in adultery, Jesus first said...nothing.

“When Jesus was brought before Pilate, accused of threatening Pilate's power, Jesus said...nothing.

“When the crowds mocked Jesus as He hung on the cross, telling Him to get down, Jesus said...nothing.”

Let us worship our God knowing there is great wisdom in silence, simply being present with God and one another.