

In Stillness...God

2007-2008 Campus Ministries Theme

Related Scripture Passages

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PSALM 46:1-11 - Restless

Written by Jim Brenneman, President of Goshen College

¹God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. ²Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea; ³though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult. Selah

⁴There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High. ⁵God is in the midst of the city; it shall not be moved; God will help it when the morning dawns. ⁶The nations are in an uproar, the kingdoms totter; he utters his voice, the earth melts. ⁷The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah

⁸Come, behold the works of the Lord; see what desolations he has brought on the earth. ⁹He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; he breaks the bow, and shatters the spear; he burns the shields with fire. ¹⁰"Be still, and know that I am God! I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted in the earth." ¹¹The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah

"Be still and know that I am God." (Ps. 46:10). Whenever I hear the words, "Stillness" or "Be still" associated with God, I get fidgety. Maybe it's because behind those words, I hear my mother's voice whispering "Sit still!" and this usually happened while we were in church. I get fidgety also because stillness is an objective impossibility (try stopping the earth's rotation!). When the Psalmist invites us to 'be still,' there must be a little wiggle room there. He speaks of stillness as a kind of movement toward God – a circling back from distraction and chaos to that priceless treasure beneath us in every moment, any time, in any place. Stillness is that journey to the alpha and omega point described by Annie Dillard as that place that is "lower than metals and minerals. . . lower than salts and earths . . . [beneath] the waxy deepness of planets." That place of stillness "in touch with the Absolute, at base," Dillard calls "Holy the Firm." The Psalmist calls us to that holy place beneath and beyond the stillness of death itself, to that holiest of all foundations, to a vital stillness, a living stillness, a pulsing ecstasy, a place of rebirth and resurrection, a fiery core of new life and oddly enough, a place of repose and rest for our frantic souls. St. Augustine speaks of such stillness when he cries out, "My soul is restless until it finds its rest in thee, O God." Who doesn't want that?

I KINGS 19:8-13 - Wind, Earthquake, and Fire, but God is in a whisper.

Written by Jim Hestand, vice president for finance

⁸He got up, and ate and drank; then he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God. ⁹At that place he came to a cave, and spent the night there. Then the word of the Lord came to him, saying, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" ¹⁰He answered, "I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away." ¹¹He said, "Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by." Now there was a great wind, so strong that 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; ¹²and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. ¹³When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then there came a voice to him that said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

Many popular movies today are action films. There are chase scenes, gun-battles, inter-galactic wars, physical feats that defy gravity and sometimes even the imagination. We sit transfixed. Commercials on TV move at light speed – 15 seconds, or at most 30, to capture the viewers' interest, to leave an indelible image in the mind of the consumer watching the screen. Jokes, laughter, moving images, interpersonal gaffes; we laugh and nod and retell the subtleties or lack of subtleties of the marketing messages over and over to our friends. Sports teams practice incessantly, year-round, athletes pump iron, training, always training, sometimes before dawn or well into the night.

Where has the world of silence and stillness gone, the listening for a whisper, for a 'quiet' sound? When the Lord appeared to Elijah, it was only after Elijah traveled forty lonely days and nights away from his own space, to Mount Horeb. And it was only after a night spent in a cave, alone with his thoughts. And only after a mighty wind passed by, after an earthquake shook the entire mountain and after fire raged on the mountaintop. The Lord was not in any of those things....but instead came to Elijah in a gentle whisper.

Am I listening? Will I sense God? Is my stillness great enough?

God, quiet my heart, and still my mind, so that I may experience your presence. Whisper to me, that I may hear and that I may experience YOU.

I SAMUEL 2:1-10

Written by Hope Langeland, senior GC student

Hannah prayed and said, "My heart exults in the Lord; my strength is exalted in my God. My mouth derides my enemies, because I rejoice in my victory. ²"There is no Holy One like the Lord, no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God. ³Talk no more so very proudly, let not arrogance come from your mouth; for the Lord is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed. ⁴The bows of the mighty are broken, but the feeble gird on strength. ⁵Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread, but those who were hungry are fat with spoil. The barren has borne seven, but she who has many children is forlorn. ⁶The Lord kills and brings to life; he brings down to Sheol and raises up. ⁷The Lord makes poor and makes rich; he brings low, he also exalts. ⁸He raises up the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap, to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honor. For the pillars of the earth are the Lord's, and on them he has set the world. ⁹"He will guard the feet of his faithful ones, but the wicked shall be cut off in darkness; for not by might does one prevail. ¹⁰The Lord! His adversaries shall be shattered; the Most High will thunder in heaven. The Lord will judge the ends of the earth; he will give strength to his king, and exalt the power of his anointed."

I believe that Hannah's prayer was said through tears. Hannah has given up her precious child, and though she says her heart rejoices in the Lord, her heart must also be aching. And yet, it is just in this joint of joy and pain that Hannah is able to speak so confidently of a God who is present in all parts of life. Hannah initially petitioned God from a position of weakness. She was a barren woman and her husband's other wife had the upper hand. God gave her a son, and therefore gave her strength in her household and community, but Hannah is now willingly putting herself in a place of weakness again. She feels such security in God's goodness that she is able to place her most precious possession in God's hands. I can't pretend to understand this kind of complete faith, but I think that it is something beyond simple submission. Hannah has experienced true joy and desolating pain and expresses them as intimately interwoven. She is able to embrace and rejoice in a God who brings both death and life. The prayer she prays describes a perspective of such deep peace, an undercurrent untouched by the highs and lows of humanity.

To be honest, I marvel at this wise woman's prayer. I doubt, and I question, and I am still seeking a faith that could allow me to give myself so fully into the hands of an unseen God. I find my own solace in Hannah's words that "The Lord is a God who knows." There is peace in being understood, even when I do not understand. May you find stillness and rest through both joy and pain, because God is a God who knows.

NEHEMIAH 8:1-12 - “Be Quiet, for this day is holy.”

Written by Tamara Shantz, assistant campus pastor

All the people gathered together into the square before the Water Gate. They told the scribe Ezra to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the Lord had given to Israel. ²Accordingly, the priest Ezra brought the law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could hear with understanding. This was on the first day of the seventh month. ³He read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive to the book of the law. ⁴The scribe Ezra stood on a wooden platform that had been made for the purpose; and beside him stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah on his right hand; and Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hash-baddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam on his left hand. ⁵And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up. ⁶Then Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God, and all the people answered, “Amen, Amen,” lifting up their hands. Then they bowed their heads and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground. ⁷Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, the Levites, helped the people to understand the law, while the people remained in their places. ⁸So they read from the book, from the law of God, with interpretation. They gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.

In this passage of Nehemiah, we are told that “this day is holy to the Lord your God” and that the appropriate response to this holiness is to be still, to rejoice and celebrate, not to mourn or weep. My first impulse was to expand the notion of ‘this day’ to include every day. To consider how this passage is encouraging us to embrace the sacredness of Creation, of the everyday gift of life. But Nehemiah and Ezra are not exhorting their people to a practice of daily gratitude (at least not in this passage). Rather, they are calling the people to set **this one day** aside as separate from all others. This one day is to be dedicated to God and to rejoicing.

Through this passage, I am reminded that in addition to finding space and time for stillness in my daily routine, God is also calling us to set aside special days as holy and sacred. The Israelites were called to this holy day in the context of the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the renewal of their covenant with Yahweh. What would it look like for us to set aside certain days as sacred, as a time for renewal, as a time dedicated to God? How do we already do this as a college community? Do we have space in our lives to listen attentively to God and rejoice in response to the wonder of Creation outside of our daily routines?

PSALM 37:1-40

Written by Kevin Gary, assistant professor of education

¹Do not fret because of the wicked; do not be envious of wrongdoers, ²for they will soon fade like the grass, and wither like the green herb. ³Trust in the Lord, and do good; so you will live in the land, and enjoy security. ⁴Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart. ⁵Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him, and he will act. ⁶He will make your vindication shine like the light, and the justice of your cause like the noonday. ⁷Be still before the Lord, and wait patiently for him; do not fret over those who prosper in their way, over those who carry out evil devices. ⁸Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath. Do not fret—it leads only to evil. ⁹For the wicked shall be cut off, but those who wait for the Lord shall inherit the land. ¹⁰Yet a little while, and the wicked will be no more; though you look diligently for their place, they will not be there. ¹¹But the meek shall inherit the land, and delight themselves in abundant prosperity. ¹²The wicked plot against the righteous, and gnash their teeth at them; ¹³but the Lord laughs at the wicked, for he sees that their day is coming. ¹⁴The wicked draw the sword and bend their bows to bring down the poor and needy, to kill those who walk uprightly; ¹⁵their sword shall enter their own heart, and their bows shall be broken. ¹⁶Better is a little that the righteous person has than the abundance of many wicked. ¹⁷For the arms of the wicked shall be broken, but the Lord upholds the righteous. ¹⁸The Lord knows the days of the blameless, and their heritage will abide forever; ¹⁹they are not put to shame in evil times, in the days of famine they have abundance. ²⁰But the wicked perish, and the enemies of the Lord are like the glory of the pastures; they vanish—like smoke they vanish away. ²¹The wicked borrow, and do not pay back, but the righteous are generous and keep giving; ²²for those blessed by the Lord shall inherit the land, but those cursed by him shall be cut off. ²³Our steps are made firm by the Lord, when he delights in our way; ²⁴though we stumble, we shall not fall headlong, for the Lord holds us by the hand. ²⁵I have been young, and now am old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread. ²⁶They are ever giving liberally and lending, and their children become a blessing. ²⁷Depart from evil, and do good; so you shall abide forever. ²⁸For the Lord loves justice; he will not forsake his faithful ones. The righteous shall be kept safe forever, but the children of the wicked shall be cut off. ²⁹The righteous shall inherit the land, and live in it forever. ³⁰The mouths of the righteous utter wisdom, and their tongues speak justice. ³¹The law of their God is in their hearts; their steps do not slip. ³²The wicked watch for the righteous, and seek to kill them. ³³The Lord will not abandon them to their power, or let them be condemned when they are brought to trial. ³⁴Wait for the Lord, and keep to his way, and he will exalt you to inherit the land; you will look on the destruction of the wicked. ³⁵I have seen the wicked oppressing, and towering like a cedar of Lebanon. ³⁶Again I passed by, and they were no more; though I sought them, they could not be found. ³⁷Mark the blameless, and behold the upright, for there is posterity for the peaceable. ³⁸But transgressors shall be altogether destroyed; the posterity of the wicked shall be cut off. ³⁹The salvation of the righteous is from the Lord; he is their refuge in the time of trouble. ⁴⁰The Lord helps them and rescues them; he rescues them from the wicked, and saves them, because they take refuge in him.

Psalm 37 brings to mind 14th century mystic Julianna of Norwich's prayer, "All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well." The psalmist calls me be still, to let go of undue anxiety, and trust that all shall be well, to believe in Paul's proclamation that everything, all worries, all frustrations, all loss, shall be redeemed and "swallowed up in victory." These are words I need to hear as I get caught up, sometimes consumed, by the immediacy of today's problems, anxious for instant resolution.

The psalmist also reminds me of the significance of good deeds in the eyes of the Lord, to direct my attention towards acting justly, albeit in small ways, rather than feeling overwhelmed by the injustice by others I see. Yet the psalmist also illuminates the thirst for justice as our restless desire for God who will quench this desire and right the scales. However, the quest for justice must be grounded in the peace of God. When I forget to ground the pursuit of justice in God I lose my way, become fatigued, feel my results are insignificant, and am easily give into cynicism. The psalmist reminds me to first "trust in the Lord" and then "do good." Psalm 37 nuances the expression "If you want peace, work for justice" to mean "If you want peace, trust in God's peace and work for justice."

PSALM 131

Written by Bill Born, vice president of student life

¹O Lord, my heart is not lifted up, my eyes are not raised too high; I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me.
²But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother; my soul is like the weaned child that is with me. ³O Israel, hope in the Lord from this time on and forevermore.

When I think of “stillness”, I’m quick to think of the escape from hectic day to day routine of family and work. Like the Southwest Airline marketing tag line of “Want to get away?”, “stillness” often for me is defined as an escape from experiences that seem overwhelming.

Psalm 131 defines “stillness” in a different light, a deeper more personal light. “My heart is not proud, Oh Lord, my eyes are not haughty”. Rather than the external pressing in; the internal, personal pride, is the defining factor of true “stillness”. The “Great matters” and “things too wonderful” that we value as defining our self worth by way of responsibility or items of personal identity stand in the way of true “stillness”.

Psalm 131 is an invitation to “stillness” through humble trust in God, humble trust apart from the day to day roles, responsibilities and defining characteristics we value as our identity. Rather than “getting away” from all that seems to matter, “stillness” begins by “letting go” of those items we so often take so seriously, those items we claim with pride.

What is it that set’s us apart from others? What is it that defines who we are? What is it that defines personal passion and purpose? Is personal pride involved? It is when we can name those items and “let them go” that we are able to “still and quiet” our souls before God.

Let go and in stillness....God.

MATTHEW 14:22-33 – In Busyness...Stillness. In Stillness...God.

Written by Phil Schmidt, junior GC student

²²Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. ²³And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, ²⁴but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. ²⁵And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea. ²⁶But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear. ²⁷But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid." ²⁸Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." ²⁹He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. ³⁰But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" ³¹Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" ³²When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. ³³And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

Wow, Jesus was one busy guy! There is a lot going on in Matthew 14: Jesus retreats off by himself after finding out about John the Baptist's beheading, the people find him and he heals the sick among them, Jesus feeds all of the people gathered around with only five loaves and two fish, he climbs a mountain, walks on water, calms a storm, and then heals more people on the other side of the lake! Wow, that had to have been a couple pretty busy days!

As I look at my own schedule, I notice my schedule packed full as well (although I have never been involved in such activities as walking on water and healing the sick ☺). I am a full time student, I am involved in music on campus, I work two campus jobs, and I am recently engaged! I cherish all of these opportunities and activities, but I don't have much room in my schedule to add a lot more. And the fact of the matter is that many others here on campus are even busier than I am!

So, what can we learn from the actions of Jesus in this passage that relates to the campus ministries theme of stillness? In verse 23, Jesus went up on the mountain alone and prayed. Jesus took time out of his schedule to take a break! This is a theme that one can find throughout the gospels. Jesus doesn't try to travel through his life on caffeine alone ☺. Instead, he takes time to go and pray and be renewed in the presence of God. Jesus knew that in order for him to have the power to do all of his future miracles, he would need God's strength.

The lesson I want to take from this passage is that I want to be like Jesus and find times to go off by myself and pray. I don't want to plow through my busy schedule without the consistent refreshing drink that comes from quietness and prayer. I hope all who read this can also take it to heart. Find time to go off by yourself and pray. Rejuvenate. God will give us the strength and peace to make it through and thrive in the midst of our wonderfully busy schedules!

May God's Peace surround you.

LUKE 6:12-16 – Jesus Chooses the Twelve Apostles

Written by Mary Olson, administrative assistant for campus ministries, MAO, CAC

12 Now during those days he went out to the mountain to pray; and he spent the night in prayer to God. ¹³And when day came, he called his disciples and chose twelve of them, whom he also named apostles: ¹⁴Simon, whom he named Peter, and his brother Andrew, and James, and John, and Philip, and Bartholomew, ¹⁵and Matthew, and Thomas, and James son of Alphaeus, and Simon, who was called the Zealot, ¹⁶and Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.

Have you ever been certain that God gave you a specific direction, and you obeyed only to end up with an outcome that felt like complete failure?

Surely it was the voice of God, wasn't it?

Maybe it was just bad pizza?

Why didn't God come through? I did my part!

Did God change His mind?

Was I hallucinating? Am I delusional? Did I just make the whole thing up?

Am I so sinful and unholy that I can't even interpret God's voice?

Jesus spent time alone with God. A huge decision was to be made: out of all these disciples, which will I choose to keep as my apostles? Which will I trust with the most important information? Which will I keep close at my side to be my friends and to experience life together?

Among others, Jesus chose Judas Iscariot, "who became a traitor." After spending all night in prayer to God, Jesus knew what to do. Obedience would end up looking like failure. Jesus knew that it wasn't going to end pretty and that Judas Iscariot would betray all trust.

Could it be, in times when I feel like God isn't coming through, that there's a purpose different than the one I imagine? Could it be that God calls me to what looks like failure for a purpose larger than me?

Can I be still enough to hear God and to trust that He is directing a plan that's larger than I'm able to understand? Can I choose to obey, knowing that it doesn't secure my success? He is God, after all . . . be still.

LUKE 11:1-13 - Teach Us to Pray

Written by Becky Horst, grants director/coordinator

He was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples."² He said to them, "When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come.³ Give us each day our daily bread.⁴ And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us. And do not bring us to the time of trial."⁵ And he said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread;⁶ for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.'⁷ And he answers from within, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.'⁸ I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs.⁹ So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you.¹⁰ For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.¹¹ Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish?¹² Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion?¹³ If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

Jesus' disciples were diligent Jews who had been taught how to pray from childhood. However, they recognize that Jesus is taking them to a new level of relationship with God. The old wineskins can no longer contain the new wine of their enlightened faith. They ask Jesus to teach them a better way to pray. He responds by giving them a model prayer and instructions on persistence.

In the NRSV, the model prayer, vs. 2-4, is a condensed version of "The Lord's Prayer," which many of us memorized as children. Each phrase is packed with potential meaning. Each phrase is worth meditating upon.

Father, hallowed be your name.

God is our beloved parent. God is also "holy other," worthy of reverence.

Your kingdom come.

We have hope for the future. God's kingdom will come and spread a healing balm in our wounded world.

Give us each day our daily bread.

God provides for us in the present, giving us what we need.

And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.

God absorbs our sins and transforms our interaction with others and with money.

And do not bring us to the time of trial.

God can also transform our sin-prone attitudes and desires.

After this model prayer, Jesus's parable and instructions urge us to pursue a relationship with God. He tells us to ask, seek, and knock—to persist because we are God's beloved children. God is fundamentally a giver, not a taker. God will respond.

MARK 4:35-41

Written by Jeff Hochstetler, senior GC student

³⁵On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side."³⁶And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. ³⁷A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. ³⁸But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?"³⁹He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. ⁴⁰He said to them, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?"⁴¹And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

Many of us shudder at the thought of leaving things to chance. Let's face it; we're a society that loves control. We have news programs forecast our weather, actuaries that calculate our risks, and insurance coverage to protect against financial loss. As humans, we like to have certainty. I believe planning is a wise and preparation is a good thing. In our quest for stability, however, we must realize that we can predict and prepare, but we cannot control. Too often we try to create stillness ourselves.

In doing so we are often thrown off course by the unexpected. In Mark, we see Jesus and his disciples caught up in a sudden storm at sea. The disciples, experienced fishermen, attempt to weather the storm themselves, but it's clear the boat is starting to sink. The distraught disciples then wake a sleeping Jesus who rebukes the wind and says to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" The wind then ceases and there is a dead calm. By acknowledging their own helplessness, the disciples turned to the God who was in the boat with them.

Often turmoil in our life is perpetuated by our love of control. When it becomes apparent that we don't control a situation, we either give up, or cut our losses and try harder. Rather than giving up or trying harder, I suggest we let go of our love of control and trust God. After rebuking the wind and calming the sea, Jesus rebukes his disciples. "Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?" We should take Jesus' challenge to the disciples a message for us as well. In doing so, may we be willing to let God calm the storms in our life. In stillness...God.

ACTS 2:1-42 - A Noisy Stillness

Written by Bob Yoder, campus pastor

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place.² And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting.³ Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them.⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.⁵ Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem.⁶ And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each.⁷ Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?" And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?⁹ Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia,¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes,¹¹ Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power."¹² All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?"¹³ But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine."

¹⁴ But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say.¹⁵ Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning.¹⁶ No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:¹⁷ 'In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.¹⁸ Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy.¹⁹ And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist.²⁰ The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day.²¹ Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'²² You that are Israelites, listen to what I have to say: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you, as you yourselves know—²³ this man, handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law.²⁴ But God raised him up, having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power.²⁵ For David says concerning him, 'I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand so that I will not be shaken;²⁶ therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; moreover my flesh will live in hope.²⁷ For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One experience corruption.²⁸ You have made known to me the ways of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence.'²⁹ Fellow Israelites, I may say to you confidently of our ancestor David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day.³⁰ Since he was a prophet, he knew that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would put one of his descendants on his throne.³¹ Foreseeing this, David spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, saying, 'He was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh experience corruption.'³² This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses.³³ Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you both see and hear.³⁴ For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, 'The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at my right hand,³⁵ until I make your enemies your footstool."³⁶ Therefore let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified."

³⁷ Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, "Brothers, what should we do?"³⁸ Peter said to them, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.³⁹ For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him."⁴⁰ And he testified with many other arguments and exhorted them, saying, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation."⁴¹ So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added.⁴² They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

"...there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind..." The Holy Spirit makes a grand entrance onto "the stage" at Pentecost. Unlike the "sound of sheer silence" that Elijah experienced in I Kings 19, these Believers had a noisy encounter with the Divine that gave them some interesting abilities. In fact, Peter preaches the words of the Old Testament prophet Joel that God would continue to pour out God's Spirit in ways not expected: sons and daughters will prophesy, young men shall see visions, and old men shall dream dreams.

I can't help but wonder what interesting abilities God grants us today? What unexpected ways is the Divine Spirit shouting out to us? Though being filled with the Spirit is no doubt a grace from God, it also seems that these early Believers postured themselves in a way to even be able to receive such an unexpected blessing. Their posture included gathering and breaking bread together, being devoted to the apostles' teaching, and engaging in prayer. In our very busy lives these days, how are we posturing ourselves?

"Now when they heard this, they were *cut to the heart*..." Another posture present is that of humility. After experiencing this Divine noisy encounter, they ask: "what should we do?" What should we do today, in the middle of all of our important happenings, to respond to God's unexpected encounters? Do we acknowledge the need for God's workings in our lives? Have we stilled ourselves to even receive such "noisy rushes"?

ACTS 4:23-31

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²³After they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them. ²⁴When they heard it, they raised their voices together to God and said, "Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth, the sea, and everything in them, ²⁵it is you who said by the Holy Spirit through our ancestor David, your servant: 'Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples imagine vain things? ²⁶The kings of the earth took their stand, and the rulers have gathered together against the Lord and against his Messiah.' ²⁷For in this city, in fact, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, ²⁸to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place. ²⁹And now, Lord, look at their threats, and grant to your servants to speak your word with all boldness, ³⁰while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus." ³¹When they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness.

Timidity. Insecure. Cowering. These are words that do NOT describe this Acts 4 passage! What we see here is a prayer that speaks to the "BIG-ness" of God, to the creative energy of the Holy Spirit, and to the bold foundation of which our faith is built. Peter and John were released from prison and reported all that happened to their friends. Then, this prayer emerged in the telling of this story. Compared to the Old Testament, such articulated prayers are not as common in the New Testament, and so I savor those that do exist. This prayer acknowledges God as Creator of all and that God's Spirit is the Holy One through which mighty signs and wonders are performed. Following this prayer, the place where they gathered was shaken! They were filled with the Holy Spirit! They spoke the word of God with boldness!

Boldness. Confident. Empowering. These are words that resonate with me as I read this passage and yearn for a faith that can be described in such terms. What holds me back? What causes me to be silent about my faith? What causes me to forget the "BIG-ness" of God's creative power? In the still and reflective moments with God, may I be reminded of the foundation of our faith. May I remember to open myself up to the "shaking work" of the Holy Spirit. May I live confidently knowing that God has a vested interest in my life and in the surroundings in which I interact.