

## Being Still

Well, it's Christmas morning and guaranteed there's a ton of smart phones and notebooks and TV's and blue tooth speakers and all kinds of other gadgets just waiting to be opened and googled with and gazed at!

We truly live in a world of instant information, constant stimulation and never ending entertainment.

For most of us these days, the last thing we see at night is not the face of our loved one, but the screen of an iPhone; and the first thing we see in the morning is not the stars still lingering before dawn, but the morning news show or the latest email or text message.

Just last year a university did a study about all this gadgetry, and the effect it has on us, and what this modern life is shaping we modern people into.

The experiment gave the participants, hundreds of men and women, electric shocks!

These were mild shocks, but strong enough and unpleasant enough that every single participant agreed that he and she would pay money NOT to get shocked again.

That is, until each person was asked to sit alone in a room for a period of time, with only their thoughts as company: no electronics, no distractions; except — there was a button to push if they wanted to shock themselves.

Do you know that within 15 minutes, 2/3 of the men and 1/4 of the women reached for that button, and shocked themselves?

Leading the investigators to conclude that our addiction to stimulation is creating an inability to simply be still with our own thoughts.

That addiction is changing who we are and how we live as human beings.

For those of us who claim Jesus as our Lord, this is a real problem indeed, because ours is not a God who shouts, and if I can't be still, how can I hear the Word who whispers?

If I can't be still, perhaps I will miss the young couple, the woman heavy with child, who desperately needs a place for the night, a safe place to bring her new born into the world.

Those who cannot be still become like the innkeeper who asks, "Do you know what it's like to run an Inn???"

It's like being lost in a forest of a million trees!

Each tree is a thing that has to be done: fresh sheets, clean towels, constantly wondering if the children are dressed warmly enough, is there enough money in the bank today, will there be enough money tomorrow????

A million trees, a million things, until finally we have eyes for nothing else, and everything we see ... turns into a thing...." Beuchner, *Secrets in the Dark*, 10, paraphrased.

If I can't be still, perhaps I'll miss that strange new prophet who talks about mustard seeds and salt and how the most important people on earth aren't the high flyers, but the children, the hungry, the merciful.

If I can't be still, then I'll drive right by that mountaintop where thousands are listening to him, and at the end of the day those thousands are famished, yet amazingly, they eat until they can eat no more — when a couple of loaves of taro bread and two ahi are blessed, then shared.

If I can't be still, I may not look up from the latest text message in time to see that fellow Lazarus, the guy who died days ago, come stumbling out of his tomb, still wearing the suit they buried him in, but, lo and behold, he's alive!

Perhaps we are so afraid to be still because we are so afraid of the world; with its wars and rumors of wars, with our political divisions and gender and race confrontations, with the uncertainties of age and health and even love.

But the Word who whispers is also the Word who is Light.

And if we can bring ourselves to be still and listen, we might find that in our stillness, we are given a gift to meet the darkness of our times.

"We may find that we are given a gift to proclaim a profound truth, courageously and defiantly against the darkness of our time; against the darkness of our own hearts; against the darkness in our conversations with one another and in the newspapers; against the darkness that darkens so many sickbeds and the beds of the dying; and against the increasing darkness of our relationships across the political divide.

With this gift we may proclaim, in the face of all darkness, that the light of the Word who whispers — shines!" K. Barth, *Sermons*, 74-75. paraphrased.

We can do just that because the Word who whispers frees us from our central conflict, because the Word who whispers is also the Word who is Life.

Our central conflict is not between body and soul, nor between sex and chastity, nor is it between religion and every day life.

No, our central conflict "is between freedom and bondage." Barth, Dogmatics, II,4.

"God doesn't become flesh to create a religion that condemns sexuality or decries the physical world, God becomes flesh to free us from our attachments to all that is not alive.

God becomes flesh to liberate us from our endless love affairs with all those things, money, power and fame, that drain us of life." Blue, From Stone to Living Word, 112. paraphrased.

And to accomplish that, the Word who whispers becomes the Word made flesh.

And because of that fact, we don't hand our lives over to mere theories or dogmas or even creeds.

We hand our lives over to the joy and depth and hope and discovery and ambiguity and yes, even the deep pain, of relationship.

Because the Word who whispers, the Word made flesh, not only loves you, she likes you too!

The Word who whispers not only welcomes YOUR pursuit of him, but HE is in pursuit of you too.

But to really let this truth sink in, we need to develop the ability to be still.

On this holy morning, may we ponder and worship, and then listen, with serenity and joy, to the gentle stirrings of the Word who Whispers.

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