

"Giving Up Talking So Much And Being Quiet -- Since I have so much to learn"

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I have tried to give up my need to share my opinion regardless of how right or well informed I may be. This is in contrast to the many opinions we hear from so many, inspired by countless news pundits and talk radio folks, on all sides. They seem to have switched from reporting news to sharing their, often emotive, opinions. I have tried to refrain, with God's help. It is NOT easy for preachers.

I have taken Swiss Theologian Karl Barth's admonition, that, as a Christian I should be well informed. As he wrote, "We should have a newspaper in in one hand and a Bible in the other," so I read a lot. Recently, two articles I have read confirmed my assertion of the humble reality, that the more we know, the less we know. So quiet, is often best.

Dr, Jonathan Feng, Professor of Physics, at U.C. Irvine, California, titled his article, "Wonder and the Gift of Not Knowing Things." He shared the reality, as a scientist, that the more we learn, the more, we realize, there is to know. He shared some humbling cosmological truths about the Universe. For example, 5 % of the Universe consists of known particles. The remaining 95% is made up of dark matter, at 27%, and the remaining 68% is dark energy. This means, as he shares, that 95% of the universe is a mystery we do NOT understand. That statement is enough to quiet the most intellectual among us.

This article was quickly followed in my readings, by a contribution in Foreign Affairs magazine in which the title, "How America lost faith in expertise," explains it all. The author, Dr. Tom Nichols, Professor of National Security Affairs at the US Naval War College, shares that, recently, listening to experts or even sharing in intellectual conversations or discussions has denigrated into "shouting matches." In other

words, we have lost the art of polite and eloquent conversation, in the tone of a past voice like a William Buckley. Instead, we seem to have a vociferous lack of tolerance and respect for anyone with different views than ourselves.

So perhaps, as we defer to the true Expert of all, a humble quiet wins over the proud and loud. I have never regretted something I have NOT said, especially in the throes of emotion. It is the kind of humble awe we hear from Psalm 8:4, "What is man that you are mindful of him." All of our knowledge is nothing in comparison to the One who knows All. This is the only way to make and sense out of what seems to be the audacious claim of Moses, to be the most humble man on earth (Numbers 12:3). What else could he mean, but that the more he got to know the largesse of God's, "I Am," the smaller, "He was" So, quiet is fitting, in light of my puny lack of what I know, in comparison to the Creator who knows all.

Also, a hushed silence comes over us, in the shared presence of His Holiness and our sin. Martin Luther, who followed in a long history of writing catechetical study, was the first to put the 10 commandments first. He did this, realizing, that of first priority in our learning, is to be cognizant of our sin. To Luther particularly, the first commandment, "You shall have no other god's before me," was tantamount in ensuring that we focus on the only One that matters. God is the great Iconoclast, who, through our personal experiences and history itself, demonstrates, time and time again, the vacuous emptiness of our idolatrous pursuits. So we are left holding nothing... but Him. When the Word takes on flesh, there are truly no words...silence prevails.

There is another fear I have, of too much "talk," as Atheist, Bertrand Russell once claimed, "The advent of intolerance that spread over the world with the advent of Christianity is one of its most curious features."

The millennial generation has an unprecedented absence from the life of the Church. They make up a huge portion of the 'nones,' who claim no religious affiliation whatsoever. For them, the church too often mirrors the insensitive and divisive world, rather than reflecting a Jesus, who ushered in the radical inbreaking of a new Kingdom and new order, that challenges the values of the secular culture. This generation has a deep understanding of, and has witnessed, world values which seem to leave one empty and void. They realize how futile such pursuits are, and long for people generating light in their lives, rather than fire in their words. So I am quiet. Living more, talking less.

Scripture also has a way of quieting my spirit. As a two edged sword, it tends to cut me down to size, rather than provide a proud bully pulpit to wave around. If I have eyes to see and ears to hear, it is a sword that slices and dices. In an objective, undeniable way, it shows how someone as amazing as the Apostle Paul can write to his young understudy, Timothy, that the great Apostle was the best sinner he knew (1 Timothy 1:15). I haven't shared that personal truth with my confirmands lately.

So quietly, I meditate on what that means, and I realize, that the Word speaks to our recent political climate as a two-edged sword. With two-edged dialectic, it reminds me what James writes, that what we say, really does matter. And, on the other edge, in Romans from Paul, I hear the admonition to pray for all leaders, which would include the likes of Nero, who, very well, was responsible for Paul's death, as well as an Emperor Hadrian, known as the wall builder.

So I am undone. Cut to my knees. Probably where I need to be. I cannot get emotive about any thing except for the only One worthy of such feelings. In the scripture, I meet a Jesus, whose truthful encounter with a Rich young ruler in the middle of the day, or Pharisee Nicodemus at night, sends them off in silence...pondering. They, like me, realize that they have been gently, but purposefully, kicked in the butt by a Lord who loves us too much not to redirect us back to Him.

I have a lot of learning to do. So I am listening. Perhaps it is only as the tax collector quietly on my knees, rather than the Pharisee proudly beating his chest, that I can truly learn from the only One worth knowing anyway.

I guess to be still, and know that He is God, is the only way I can hear the still, small voice of the only One worthy of my loyalty and my listening anyway.

Shalom,

Pastor Mike

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