

Signs of Significance Silence and Simplicity

First Kings 19:11-12 and Ecclesiastes 4:6-8

Ypsilanti First United Methodist Church

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Note: This sermon began with three persons singing the song Dona Nobis Pacem—(Latin for Let us have peace) #376 in the United Methodist Hymnal. The song was begun with the first strain and then continued in a canon (round) until it had been sung twice through by all the singers.

Dona Nobis Pacem is Latin for let us have peace. This song dating from the 16th century, is usually sung as we did it, in what is called a canon or round. That is, the song is sung over and over with people beginning at different intervals until everyone has sung the song through twice.

There is something mesmerizing about hearing the notes of a round—the harmonies that come forth when the song is sung with all the voices. Dona Nobis pacem. Let us have peace.

I first heard this song as a little girl, when my mom would sing it and play for me on her violin. My mom was a music teacher and choir director and she taught my siblings and me this song when we were quite young and she taught us to sing it in a round or a canon.

It seemed kind of silly to us at first, the repetitive latin phrases sung over and over again—the simple melody line repeated in a round. Instead of being silly or boring, what my siblings and I learned by singing this song was that sometimes it is important to repeat words to ourselves—the word repetition actually slows us down and brings a sense of peace. And the simple melody sung in a round, brings beautiful harmonies which touch the soul and spirit.

Dona Nobis Pacem—let us have peace. The song reminds us all of the value of simplicity.

In today's world, simplicity is often seen as a sign of being behind the times. We value instant communication, myriads of video images, multi media experiences where we can see many things at once. Think CNN here with the news picture showing and the scrolling text going on at the same time.

I got a new cell phone this week—My old cell phone is at least six years old, and mostly is just a phone. It rings, I answer it and that is all. I was amazed by this new phone, which is not only a phone, but also an MP3 player, a GPS navigator, a digital camera, a streaming video player and a ton of other things which I haven't figured out yet—I am asking my kids to help me with it. But mostly this phone is an instant communication tool.

And it IS great to have all this wonderful communication, media and technology at our fingertips, but sometimes it is simply too fast, too fast for our souls. Sometimes we need to slow down, we need to let go and we need to let our souls catch up with us. Like a simple repeating phrase—*Dona Nobis Pacem*—we need to be reminded of what is important, we need to hear it and slow down enough to feel it in our souls.

There is a wonderful story of an explorer who was in a big rush to get to his exploration site. His flight landed and he got out of the airplane and he had a lot of stuff that he was taking into the back country where he would be exploring. He hired several of the local persons to help carry his stuff into the forest and he told them that he was in a big hurry. And he rushed along and kept asking everyone to move faster and faster. He kept rushing and rushing, moving faster and faster—when all of sudden, the folks carrying his belongings just stopped. They stopped and they put everything they were carrying down. They placed it all on the ground and the explorer grew frustrated. He said, "What are you doing? Why are you stopping?" And when he finished speaking, one of the people carrying his stuff spoke up and said simply—"Sir, we will not move from here for a while. We have been in such a hurry and moved at such a quick pace, that we will wait here now, for our souls to catch up with us.

Sometimes we just need to stop and wait, for our souls to catch up with us. For without our souls, our lives have little meaning. Sometimes we need to simplify, to slow down, to remember God, to remember we are God's children. Sometimes we need to put down all the stuff we are carrying, and simply be. Like the repeating phrase—*Dona Nobis pacem*, Let us have peace—sometimes we need to remember the deep and peaceful simplicity of a God who loves us and gives us life. The author of Ecclesiastes writes about this in saying, "Better is a handful with quiet than two handfuls with toil and a chasing after the wind.... For whom am I toiling they ask? This is also vanity and an unhappy business." (*NRSV*)

Dona Nobis Pacem, Let us have peace. Sometimes we need to slow down, and put down all our stuff. Sometimes we need to remember the benefits of a life of simplicity which leads us to deeper relationship with God. It is just easier to relate to God when we don't have so much stuff in the way. Simplicity helps us to be grateful people, thankful for the blessings God has showered on us. Simplicity helps us to find meaning in our lives and to find peace. God's peace.

We often find peace with God through silence and solitude. Consider the story of the prophet Elijah and the dramatic way God speaks to Elijah. God speaks not in the dramatic wind, the earthquake or fire. No it was in "a sound of sheer silence" (v. 12) that God speaks.

If we look at the rest of this passage we can see that meeting God changed Elijah. It rested and refreshed him. It reset his attitude and lifted his depression. It prepared him for life once he went down the mountain again. It restored his sense of God's purpose in his life. His solitude filled him up with God so that he was spiritually and emotionally healthy enough to be around people again.

All from meeting with God alone and in the quiet.

We recognize silence and solitude as spiritual disciplines — ways to connect with God — ways to make room for God in our lives. Jesus got away from people and by himself frequently, and the church has encouraged these disciplines throughout its history.

For the truth is that quite often God's presence is most easily discerned when we choose the solitude and silence to seek God.

Cut the clutter and seek the comfort. God still speaks, but it may be in a really small, still voice. It may even be in a song, with repeating words and a simple melody.

At the end of this long winter may we have peace. As some of us face the loss of a loved one, depression, job loss, relationship challenges, stress, illness. May we have peace. Dona Nobis pacem.

May we stop running around in circles and put down our stuff so our souls can catch up with us. May we listen for the still small voice of God, which speaks to us and our souls and calls us to lives of significance and great meaning.

Dona Nobis Pacem. Let us have peace. Amen.