

## ***The Silence Is Shattered<sup>1</sup>***

Epiphany 2 (Yr B)

[Psalm 139:1-10; 1 Samuel 3:1-10(11-20); 1 Corinthians 6:12-20; John 1:43-51]

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Rev. Frank C. Ruffatto

**Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father, and our Lord and King, Jesus the Christ. Amen.**

**Let us pray:** Almighty God, in Christ You make all things new: transform the poverty of our nature by the riches of Your grace, and in the renewal of our lives make known Your heavenly glory; through Jesus Christ Your Son our Lord, Amen.

When Malachi the prophet died, the Word of the Lord fell silent. No longer was the prophetic Word of the Lord to be heard spoken through a living prophet. There was no one on whom the Spirit of Yahweh had come to rest. The tongues of the prophets were stilled, and the Word of the Lord was silent for four hundred years.

***[Pause here for a moment of silence –  
long enough for people to begin to feel uncomfortable.]***

The silence makes us uncomfortable, doesn't it? Silence especially makes us feel uncomfortable in a church service. Some of you probably wondered what was happening; some of you were thinking I had done something wrong. The pastor is not talking; the organ is not playing – maybe somebody forgot their music, or the pastor lost his place. And it made you uncomfortable. The point is, we do not like silence when we expect to hear someone speaking.

Imagine, then, how the people of God must have felt. This was no ordinary silence. The voice of God speaking through the prophets was silent for four hundred years. For a time much longer than the United States has been a country, the prophets of God were not speaking.

There have been times when all of us have been alone with our thoughts. Sometimes it can be soothing. But if silence goes on too long, it can be devastating to the mind and heart. Lack of communication destroys marriages, ruins friendships, and can end your career very quickly. It must have been terrible for the people of God. Where was the living voice of God? Where are his prophets? What has become of God and His promises? If God is now silent, then what is my hope? Are His promises still good? Has God abandoned us? It was a terrible, godly silence.

Then at just the right time, the voice was back. The silence of the prophets was shattered. From the wilderness and barren regions, the voice of one came just as Isaiah had foretold. **“In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a**

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<sup>1</sup> Sermon background and study helps from Rev. Jeffery A. Stone, *Concordia Pulpit*, Volume 28, Part 1, Year B (2018), electronic version

**highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain.”<sup>2</sup>**

It is the preaching of John that prepares the way. He draws people to his message that a greater One is coming to gather the wheat and burn the chaff. The Messiah is coming, and is even here, John said.

Everything Moses and the prophets said is to come is coming to pass right now. Do not miss this! Hold on! Get ready! Like one of my seminary professors, Dr. Reed Lessing was known to say, “Bachman-Turner Overdrive was right: ‘You ain’t seen nothing yet!’”

With fire and Holy Spirit power, the Messiah comes, but instead of being a terrible judge, awesome to behold, He is a lamb. **“Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”<sup>3</sup>** John says. The Messiah, with gentleness, heals and teaches. In lowliness, the Messiah calls disciples and raises the dead to life. Gentiles will follow Him; sinners adore Him; little children call him “Son of David.” The Messiah of God loves the lame, the mute, the seeing, and the blind. In humility, this Messiah touches lepers and washes feet. To be the Lamb of God means to be lowly and gentle and humble to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Beloved, we need that Lamb. In this world where death lords over us – and I am not just pointing to a pandemic with a high survival rate, or an irascible tohubohu culture bent on virtue signaling and canceling out those who disagree – we sinners long for that gentle Lamb, who is also our Good Shepherd, because the enemy stalks us with cold efficiency. From the moment we are born, the enemy is doing his evil best to turn us into a spiritual corpse. Satan’s purpose is to fill your soul with darkness and make sin seem like the good, right, and noble thing to do.

When this happens, we ignore the importance of God’s Word for our faith. We ignore our neighbors, turn against them, whisper against them, and generally treat one another as if they were not someone for whom Christ died.

When I sin and when you sin in this and every other way we can possibly dream up, we offend God and His holiness. Yes, our sins are no small thing; they are a personal offense against God! There is no nice way to say it: Sin is a God-sized problem, and you and I are nowhere near big enough to solve it. If we understand anything at all, we cover our mouths in silence.

After all those centuries of silence, after our own penitential silence, we now hear the new voice of the Prophet, of *the* Prophet, the voice of God. Jesus of Nazareth. John had pointed to Him, told us to listen to Him, and now Jesus’ own voice shatters the silence.

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<sup>2</sup> Isaiah 40:3-4

<sup>3</sup> John 1:29

After all those centuries of silence, some knew they needed to hear him. He invited Andrew to **“come and see”**<sup>4</sup>, and Andrew did – came and saw and heard and stayed . . . and brought his brother Simon. Simon heard Jesus call him by a new name, Peter, the Rock, and Peter followed. Then Jesus called to Philip, **“Follow me!”**<sup>5</sup> - and Philip did.

Philip heard, and Philip understood. **“We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote,”**<sup>6</sup> he told his friend Nathanael. The long-promised Messiah has come to the world and shattered the silence of the prophets. This is the one of whom Moses said, “Listen to him” in Deuteronomy 18<sup>7</sup>. In Jesus, the new covenant promised in Jeremiah 31:31<sup>8</sup> will come to pass on the night of His betrayal. Isaiah foretells of His suffering, and Nathan tells David that his kingdom will be forever.

**“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”**<sup>9</sup> This is the prophetic proclamation of the Son of God. With the incarnation of God and the revealing Epiphany light, the Messiah, Christ Jesus, invades the world, and the kingdom of the enemy has no chance. This invasion of God is one where the only cry is that of a baby being born. There are no huge machines of war, but rather a tiny hand that grasps Mother and Father’s hands. No uniforms with medals and general’s stars, but rather strips of common cloth to swaddle a newborn and a bright, single star to light the way for travelers bearing gifts for a king.

The silence of heaven is broken with Jesus’ infant cries, and John’s recognition of Him as the Lamb to be slain. Christ will save those who trust in Him, just as Moses and the prophets said. He will save them by dying for them.

We cannot fully comprehend the wonder and majesty of the baby in the manger unless we embrace the truth that He is revealed to be the God-Man on the cross for us sinners. On that hill called Calvary, it looked as if Satan had won the battle. The Messiah was wounded and nailed. The Son of Mary looked to the sky and shouted for His Father, but heaven was silent.

Then on the third day, the silence of heaven was shattered. It was broken by the sound of an earthquake – by the tearing of the veil in the temple. The silence was broken with the announcement of an angel, **“He is not here, for He has risen.”**<sup>10</sup> Death and grave were no match for this Lamb, this Savior, this Christ. He is ours, and He is for us forever.

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<sup>4</sup> cf. John 1:46

<sup>5</sup> John 1:43

<sup>6</sup> John 1:45

<sup>7</sup> cf. Deuteronomy 18:15 ~ “The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers – it is to him you shall listen –”

<sup>8</sup> Jeremiah 31:31 ~ “Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah

<sup>9</sup> Matthew 3:2

<sup>10</sup> Matthew 28:6

After all the centuries of silence, some eagerly hear. **“We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.”**<sup>11</sup> But others answer like Nathanael: **“Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”**<sup>12</sup> With our God-sized problem, will we try to hold out for a voice more to our liking?

St. Paul reminds us in his letter to the Colossians: **“He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.”**<sup>13</sup> And Jesus’ own voice promised Nathanael, **“Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”**<sup>14</sup>

What Moses preached and what the prophets declared is the final, ultimate, and eternal yes to all God’s promises.<sup>15</sup> All history of heaven and earth comes to its apex in Jesus Christ, our Lord. The Child of Bethlehem, bathed in Epiphany light, redeems you and me.

And soon enough, Nathanael, too, believed: **“Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!”**<sup>16</sup> You, beloved, also trust Him, and He has, and He will save you by grace alone through faith.

Get ready! Repent and believe the Good News! The silence of heaven is shattered! Maranatha! Jesus is coming! Amen.

**May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.**<sup>17</sup>

### **POINTS TO PONDER**

1. The sermon is largely based on the Gospel for Epiphany 2 – John 1:43-51
  - a. What would you identify as ‘the Law’ in this pericope?
  - b. What would you identify as ‘the Gospel’?
2. What do you make of Jesus calling ‘regular guys’ like Andrew and Nathanael to follow Him?
3. Considering Jesus instruction to ‘make disciples’ (cf. Matthew 28:19-20) what does Jesus call to ‘follow Me,’ mean for you?
4. Where do you go – what is your response in those times in life when God seems silent?

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<sup>11</sup> John 1:45

<sup>12</sup> John 1:46

<sup>13</sup> Colossians 1:17

<sup>14</sup> John 1:51

<sup>15</sup> cf. 2 Corinthians 2:20 (NIV)

<sup>16</sup> John 1:49

<sup>17</sup> Romans 15:13