

Trinity 11 (EP-3) (2018)

“Then went king David in, and sat before the Lord.”

Without a doubt, most of us do not do nearly enough “sitting before the Lord.” Oh yes, we sit before our televisions. We sit before our computer screens. But, not nearly enough before the Lord God Almighty.

American liturgical scholar Louis Weil tells of an experience which highlights the importance of the latter.

It seems his best friend in France is a woman in her 90s. When he visits, she is eager for the two of them to receive communion together.

On one visit, on a Sunday morning, they agreed to meet at a church in Paris.

Dr. Weil said he asked his friend what time he should arrive at the church and was told 10 a.m. He found this a little surprising because liturgy itself – the Mass – began at 11 a.m. But he did as she said.

Arriving a few minutes after the hour, he found a number already present, including his friend. Some were standing; some sitting, some kneeling; some prostrate on the pavement.

What they had in common was that they were all absolutely silent and remain so during the entire period leading up to the beginning of the liturgy.

He was very moved by this experience. He found himself united to God and his fellow worshippers in way he had not experienced before.

Words of an early rabbi came to mind:

“If we are to participate in one hour of liturgical prayer, it should be preceded by two hours of silence.”

While acknowledging that such a model would not work in a parish church situation, he, nevertheless, went on to say that we would all benefit greatly by more silence and less chatter both before and in our worship.

In short, we would do well to followed David’s model of sitting before the Lord.

Another story . . .

Thomas O. Chisholm was as born in Franklin, Ky., in 1866 and spent his early life on a farm.

As an adult, he worked as an educator, the editor of a newspaper and finally as the manager and editor of a Christian magazine.

Though talented and industrious, ill health, kept him from achieving much worldly and financial success.

Yet, as he sat before God reflecting on how his life was spent, he was able to write: Great is thy faithfulness.

*Morning by morning new mercies I see
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord unto me!*

This morning, I want to encourage you (even as I encourage myself) to learn the art of holy silence.

In my early experience of the Episcopal Church, silence before worship was one thing that distinguished her from other Protestant churches. It was taken for granted.

When you went for service, you went to your pew, pulled down your kneeler, knelt, did your business with God *and remained silent*. You prepared yourself for worship. The rabble of the world outside was left behind.

That silence, I am sorry to say, is not as evident in our churches today as it was in the days of my youth.

I am reminded of a story.

This, by the way, is no preacher fable. It really did happen.

Prior to an evening service in a non-Episcopal Church – the exact denomination will not be disclosed -- the organist played softly as the people gathered. To her dismay, though, the roar from the assembling congregation got louder and louder.

At first, she tried increasing the volume of the organ, putting on a few more stops. It didn't work. People just talked louder.

As that was not working, she tried something else. Very suddenly, she lowered the volume. You will never guess what happened? A high woman's voice was heard throughout the whole church saying: "She did?"

Just maybe, we need to re-learn the art of holy silence. After all there is good biblical warrant for it. Indeed, it comes from none other than God Himself. Speaking through the Old Testament prophet Isaiah, He says:

"In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength."

Anglican theologian J.I. Packer has written: **“Christian faith means hearing, noting, and doing what God says.”**

How are we going to ‘note’ and ‘do’ if we don’t hear? How are we going to hear if we are always talking? Well, I think you get my point. ///

Let’s turn now and look more closely at what was going on in David’s life in today’s passage.

In the verses just preceding where we picked up reading, David had gotten the idea of building God a house. At the time the ark of the covenant was still housed in a tent. He meanwhile lived in a magnificent house of cedar. It just didn’t seem right.

And so, David told the prophet Nathan what was on his heart.

Sensing the king’s sincerity, the prophet gave him the green light. He told him to go build his Temple and God would be with him.

But that very night, God gave Nathan a very different message to take back to the king. That message was this:

Such a house would indeed be built, but it would not be built by David. His son would build it.

But, God had an even greater message for Nathan to deliver to David: God wanted to build David a house.

Not one of wood or stone, mind you, but a dynasty, a dynasty to which there would be no end.

We who live in this side of the cross know how God made good on that promise. The ultimate king to come out David’s loins was and is King Jesus.

His rule is forever. And more than that, His rule is **universal**. It encompasses all people, yes, even those nations that were not looking for a Messiah. No, one is left out.

It is in response to this revelation, that we find David sitting before the Lord. His stance is one of humility and awe.

One commentator has written:

“David’s attitude wasn’t ‘I am so great that even God gives me gifts.’ His attitude was, ‘God is so great that he gives even me gifts.’”

That should be our response as well:

“Why me? Everything I have and am is gift. I didn’t earn or deserve any of your blessings, O Lord my God, and yet you have bestowed them on me.”

And, of course, the natural sequel is thanksgiving. In the words of the children’s chorus:

**Thank you, Lord, for saving my soul,
Thank you, Lord, for making me whole; Thank you, Lord, for giving to me
Thy great salvation so rich and free.**

But, David did something else that day. Not only did he sit before God, he appropriated God’s promise.

What do I mean by ‘appropriated’? I think that will become apparent as we look at verse 25. Here, David prays:

**“O Lord God, the word that thou hast spoken concerning thy servant, and
‘concerning his house, establish it for ever.”**

It works like this. David has been handed a cheque. The cheque has been signed by God. But David must take it to the bank and cash it, and this is what we find him doing when he says, **“Establish it.”**

The same is true in our lives.

Just because God promises something does not mean that we possess that thing in fact. No, we must reach out and claim it. We must appropriate it.

Allow me to give you three examples of what I am talking about:

The first concerns **forgiveness**. In the Scriptures, God promises forgiveness. It’s real and it is offered as a gift. But, that gift must be received. It mustn’t be left on the table.

1 John 1:9 tells us as much:

“If we confess our sins, he [God] is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins.”

Do you see the point I am making?

A second example concerns **peace**. **“My peace I give to you,”** says Jesus in John 14:27.

But, that peace must likewise be appropriated. With David, we must say, “Let it be established.” We must open our hearts and let God plant it there.

A still third example concerns **guidance**.

In Psalm 32:8 God solemnly promises:

“I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go.”

The promise is real, but, again, it must be taken off the table.

In closing, we have before us this morning one of the loveliest passages in the Bible, one which allows us to see into the heart of the great King from whose line our Lord Jesus Christ came.

From this passage – in particular from the example of David -- let us learn or re-learn the art of holy silence.

And as we do, as we wait in God’s presence, let us also learn to appropriate God’s promises.

“Nothing pleases God better than to see his promises put in circulation,” says the great 19th century preacher Charles Spurgeon.

Are you willing to put them into circulation this morning? Am I?

If we are, we shall find what the hymnwriter found: “Great is thy faithfulness, O Lord, unto me!”