

**Text:** [Luke 2:22-40](#)  
**Date:** December 27, 2020  
**Title:** “Those Who Dream Cannot Keep Silent ”  
**Theme:** Silence is a spiritual discipline – until it’s not!

## 1

Silence can be many things: delicate or heavy, peaceful or stressful, empty or full of meaning. Silence can be a mark of warm-hearted love, or cold-eyed hate. It can provide space for reflection, or cover for oppression. Silence can be many things, but it always holds emotional weight.

Silence is also a space for God’s activity. In some interpretations of Genesis 1, there is no sound prior to the sound of God’s voice. It’s the breaking of the silence that begins bringing the world to life.

## 2

It’s no wonder, then, that silence is also part of many spiritual traditions. Some monks and nuns regularly practice silence as part of the rhythm of life. People go on silent retreats as a tool to calm their minds. Silent meditation is an important component of Buddhist and other Eastern spiritual practice. And for many Christians, the practice of contemplative prayer – essentially holding silence before God – is gaining acceptance as a way of experiencing God that transcends the words we so often rely on. Silence is a spiritual practice that helps us move beyond the rational to the relational, and gain a sense of God’s love for us and presence with us.

In short, silence is a spiritual discipline. At least, until it’s not!

## 3

We don't know a lot about the spiritual practices of Simeon or Anna. What we do know is that these were elders who heard a word from God in the silence of their hearts. They listened faithfully, not just for a week or a month but for a lifetime. And God spoke.

Simeon is described as “righteous and devout,” with “the Holy Spirit resting on him.” Anna was a prophet, a widow likely from the time she was in her

early 20s until her mid-80s. According to the scripture, she did nothing but fast and pray.

#### 4

In reading about these two, I can't help thinking about all the older saints of the church I have known through the years, people who have inspired me with their wisdom and insight. I've been blessed by elders who teach me patience and perseverance through all of life's ups and downs. And though I've met a ton of older saints who rivaled and often exceeded me in terms of their energy for church work, the ones who have made the biggest impression on my faith have been the prayer warriors. These are the people I want praying for me if I'm ever sick or in the hospital. And though we call them 'warriors' the reality is that they are some of the most peaceful people you will ever know. To be with them is to breathe in the presence of the Spirit.

I'm convinced that one does not grow in spiritual wisdom without practicing silence: without learning to quiet one's heart in prayer before God. It doesn't have to be a big production – maybe three minutes is a good place to start if you're not used to it – but if we consider that practice over a lifetime, it amounts to a lot of time simply being with God.

Just like in the beginning, keeping silence is creating space for God's activity in us. Silence sets the stage for us to be transformed, because when we hear the voice of God, we can't help but be changed.

That's why we talk about silence as a spiritual discipline. It's an essential component of experiencing God's guidance, God's peace, and God's presence.

#### 5

Anna and Simeon listened faithfully, and God spoke. They heard God saying, again and again, "I'm on my way. I'm coming to save my people." They believed it so firmly that they kept looking for it. Every day they kept looking for it, until that day Mary and Joseph showed up holding this newborn baby. And when the thing they had been waiting for finally happened, they could no longer keep silence.

Silence is a spiritual discipline – until it's not.

The discipline of silence helps us to uncover God's dream. It gets us to the revelation. But here's the thing: once you have the revelation, once God lets you in on the dream, then you CAN'T keep silence. You've got to tell somebody, because you can't keep God's dreams a secret. Those who dream cannot keep silent.

I'm sure that those who spent time around Simeon and Anna got really sick of hearing them prattle on about what God had been saying to them. I'm sure folks walked away from Simeon saying, "The old man's gone crazy. Ain't nobody gonna come save us." Except, then somebody did.

When we get a glimpse of what God is doing in the world – whether we get a vision for how God is calling us to live, the people whom God is calling our church to serve, how God is working in our lives or in the lives of those around us – we need to share it.

Silence gives God room to speak. But once God has spoken, then it's time to tell someone.

I'm here, in part, because when I lived in Raleigh, my pastor's wife heard me read the scripture in church and said to her husband: "That boy oughta go to seminary." God told her, she told Ned, Ned told me. What Rochelle heard in the silence of her heart didn't stay there.

Now, it's true that sometimes sharing what we've heard is hard. Sometimes the news just isn't as good as we want it to be. Simeon has to tell Mary some difficult things: "this boy... will be a sign that generates opposition... and a sword will pierce your heart too." God's dreams don't always meet with everyone's approval. Just in the same way that turning on a light always creates a shadow.

But ultimately, whether the message is joyful or challenging, those to whom God chooses to reveal the dream can't keep silent about it. That's not God's desire for us. Jesus said, "What you whisper in the dark will be proclaimed from the rooftops." <sup>1</sup> Anna and Simeon didn't keep silence. They couldn't. Those who dream God's dreams can't.

So let me ask you: What dream has God revealed to you? Who are you going to tell about it?

Because silence is a spiritual discipline...until it's not!

Merry Christmas, and amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 12:3