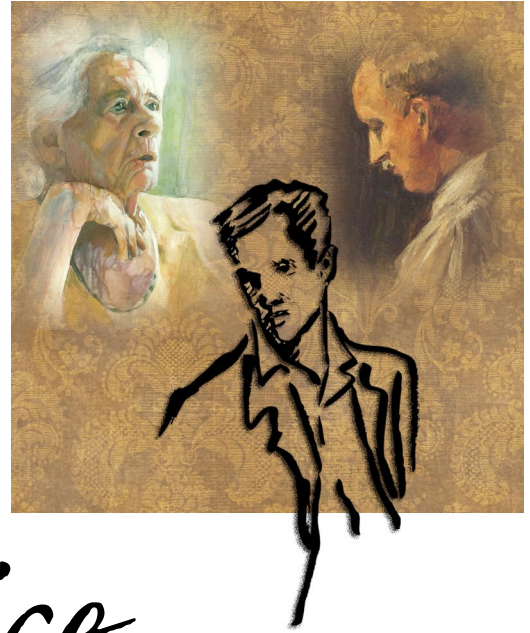


Still, there were days when he wondered where his Lord was. Did He still care? Did Jesus care that he still had so much to learn? Or were his Savior's expectations of him as low as his own?



His Voice

A Lifeless Noise

IT IS A DANGEROUS TIME FOR THE MAN. Even he recognizes it: he is just one small step away from complacency. He knows just enough, that on some days he thinks he knows it all. On other days he thinks he knows all that is necessary. Either is fraught with danger. On his *best* days he understands that he knows very little at all.

He pores over the gospels and marvels at the creative and patient way Jesus taught His followers when He walked the earth. How wonderful it would have been to sit at His feet and learn the ways of God firsthand. He remembers how much he enjoyed sitting under a college professor, learning not just from the words, but from the teacher's vocal inflections, his gestures, his facial expressions. Oh, how he wished he could learn from his Lord in the same way!

Now Jesus is silent. The man can feel His presence, can commune with His Spirit. He can read the chronicles of His life in the gospels and absorb His written teachings. But the voice of Jesus is silent. Until The Day, he will not hear the subtle inflections of His voice, see His descriptive gestures, or gaze upon His expressive, loving face. He is silent.

The man prays to his Lord, longing to hear His voice. He tires of the modern cacophony with which he is enveloped, the spirit-numbing siren song persuading, cajoling, relentlessly teaching him the ways of a fallen world. He has so much yet to learn! How will he possibly hear what he needs from the Lord through the world's desiccated, lifeless noise?

Now Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the settlers of Gilead, said to Ahab, "As the Lord, the God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, surely there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word." The word of the Lord came to him, saying, "Go away from here and turn

Knowing Him

eastward, and hide yourself by the brook Cherith, which is east of the Jordan. It shall be that you will drink of the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to provide for you there." So he went and did according to the word of the Lord, for he went and lived by the brook Cherith, which is east of the Jordan. The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening, and he would drink from the brook.

1 Kings 17:1-6

Standing in a drought, the man longs for the clean, running brook of his Savior's voice.

In his closet he prays again and, grudgingly, accepts the silence. Oh, to hear the voice of his Lord...

A Still Small Voice

There once was a prophet badly in need of instruction. After enjoying a number of mountain-peak victories over the enemies of God, a truly nasty woman decided her world would be improved if the prophet was henceforth removed from the land of the living. Feeling very much alone and put upon, the prophet retired to a cave to lick his wounds and feel sorry for himself.

...and behold, the word of the Lord came to him, and He said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" So he said, "I have been very zealous for the Lord God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life."

1 Kings 19:9b-10 NKJV

The prophet needed to hear from the Lord. In fact, what he *wanted* was for the Lord to rain down fire upon the head of that vile Jezebel woman who was out to kill him. Why couldn't He do this one small thing for him? After all, hadn't the Lord recently—and dramatically—rained down fire on the altar in the sight of the Baal worshipers? But God chose a less-theatrical answer for His whimpering emissary.

Then He said, "Go out, and stand on the mountain before the Lord." And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice.

1 Kings 19:11-12 NKJV

Hollywood would have us believe that the Lord God speaks only in the bombast of thunder and lightning, in the earthquake and the firestorm. But sometimes the Almighty chooses to whisper in our ear.



I, too, have yearned to experience Jesus' intimate, personal instruction. I have longed to be a Mary sitting at His feet, drinking in every word, every nuance of tone, every touch of his gentle hands. I have longed to be in the crowd spread across the hillside, sitting under the fresh wisdom of His detailed message. I have wished to sit around the early morning fire with His disciples, smelling the fish roasting over the charcoal fire, listening to His counsel.

So when they got out on the land, they saw a charcoal fire already laid and fish placed on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples ventured to question Him, "Who are You?" knowing that it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and the fish likewise. This is now the third time that Jesus was manifested to the disciples, after He was raised from the dead. So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Tend My lambs."

John 21:9,12-15

I, too, have yearned to hear the voice silenced by His ascension. But then, when I least expect it, there it is. For, in truth, His voice is not silent at all.

The Voice of Jesus

She was both old, and an old friend. Ruth had been a nurse for most of her life. The warm-hearted spinster also had been a modest, unpretentious pillar of the church in which I was raised. For many years she taught the senior adult Sunday School class. In her later years, Ruth took up residence in a tiny apartment near the site where our old church once stood, and it was my privilege to call on her from time to time.

The initial motive was to pay respect to someone who had played an important role in my spiritual upbringing, but soon the motive for the visits became less benevolent. For visiting with Ruth was like sitting down to tea with Jesus. Without grand eloquence, without high-sounding rhetoric, this saint personified

the quiet gentleness of the Savior. Even when speaking about her years as a nurse, she filled one's spirit with the Spirit of Christ.

And I would leave those visits uplifted, feeling as if I had just heard the gentle voice of Jesus.

Because I had.



Jim was a venerable member of another congregation of which I was a part. One day he patiently endured my childish petulance over not being suitably appreciated by the membership for the work I was doing in the church. Without condemnation or even irritation, Jim answered, "You aren't doing it for them. You're doing it for Jesus. Do it for Him, and let Him distribute the blessings where He wants them."

These words—this counsel—were not from flesh, but from the Spirit. This was not my friend Jim giving me advice, but Jesus Himself reordering my faulty priorities.

In Our Midst

The voice of Jesus is *not* silent, for He still speaks through those who live the nearest to Him.

Jesus teaches us through the written word. He teaches us how to live through the words He spoke two millennia past, and through the doctrine and lives of those who followed.

But Jesus teaches us as well through the lives and words of His saints today. He is not silent; His eloquent and patient counsel may be heard in the church pews, behind the pulpit, in the automobile, on the living room couch.

"For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst."

Matthew 18:20

continued...