

No Turning Back- Living the surrendered life

Lesson 19

The Sound of Silence...

Mark 14:27-65

San Jose State University 's English Department annually holds a contest to see who can write the worst opening line to a bad novel. Here are some from a few years ago.

- **"Just beyond the Narrows, the river widens."**
- **"With a curvaceous figure that Venus would have envied, a tanned, unblemished oval face framed with lustrous thick brown hair, deep azure-blue eyes fringed with long black lashes, perfect teeth that vied for competition, and a small straight nose, Marilee had a beauty that defied description."**
- **"Andre, a simple peasant, had only one thing on his mind as he crept along the East wall: 'Andre creep. Andre creep. Andre creep.'"**
- **"Stanley looked quite bored and somewhat detached, but then penguins often do."**

Now, I know that you know that I've had some pretty bad openings too-- oh let's say maybe one or two of my sermons! But what if I started a sermon this way:

"Everyone here this morning within earshot of this sermon will fall away from Jesus. You will all turn your backs."

Hmm... so what do you think? This could possibly go down as the worst opening line to any sermon in history. But I want you to know though, that I can't take neither the blame nor the credit for these words--because--these words belong to Jesus--and it's at times like this that I'm reminded that Jesus rarely held back His words from His disciples.

Read Mark 14:27-42

Here's what the scene looks like:

- As soon as they leave the melancholy of the Last Supper, Jesus begins a conversation in Mark 14:27 with his disciples informing them of their inevitable apostasy. **"You will all fall away," Jesus told them, 'for it is written: "I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered."**
- And then notice what Jesus does... **v. 28 "But after I have risen I will go ahead of you into Galilee."** This verse is sort of filled with empty comfort...He-will-go-ahead-of-us-to-Galilee? What is that supposed to mean? Is that supposed to make us feel better? **Well, actually...maybe it does...**

But we cannot feel better yet because Jesus says that everyone will leave Him.

- Of course there's no surprise here that Peter says otherwise.

Then by 14:50- **everyone deserts him!**

In 14:65 Mark leaves Jesus with guards – not Roman guards, mind you, but guards of the Sanhedrin – religious guards beating Jesus, mocking him, and spitting upon him. And from this point forward, with the exception of a simple "Yes" to Pilate, we have to endure in Mark the silence of Jesus.

Silence to me seems to be a negative thing. In this case I've been reminded by Simon and Garfunkel's most famous song "The sound of Silence" that this is negative... "Hello darkness my old friend..."

Silence is usually considered to be a negative response. In the 25 years Helen and I have been married, I've been given the silent treatment (let's just say) once or twice. I'm not prepared today to go in to detail why she gave me the silent treatment, but trust me...I've received it before! I don't like it. I'm guessing you don't like it either.

Look at the scene in 14:65-- Peter, James, and John follow Jesus into a garden. Jesus no doubt filled with anxiety, overwhelmed with sorrow, falling to the ground, longing for God's will, but realizing the suffering that will come with this.

As Jesus returns from the prayer, Peter, **Mr. Endurance himself**, is sound asleep. Jesus decides he needs to pray some more so he goes off to pray. When he returns, the snoring is louder this time. When they wake up and see him standing there, they say nothing. Jesus goes to pray again, and when he returns -- you guessed it -- slumber time in the garden.

Listen to more of the story:

Mark 14:43-52: Just as he was speaking, Judas, one of the twelve appeared. With him was a crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders. Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: the one I kiss is the man. Arrest him and lead him away under guard. Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, Rabbi! And kissed him. The men seized Jesus and arrested him. Then one of those standing near drew his ear and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear. Am I leading a rebellion, Jesus said, that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? Everyday I was with you, teaching in the temple courts and you did not arrest me. But the Scriptures must be fulfilled. Then everyone deserted him and fled. A young man, wearing nothing but a linen garment was following Jesus. When they seized him, he fled naked, leaving his garment behind.

We see things go from the fog of the early morning sleepies--to Judas, who enters the scene wide-eyed and awake. Now Peter is wide awake--at least awake enough to cut off an ear of the high priest's servant, although Mark does not name Peter for some reason.

Oddly enough, the moment Jesus speaks of the Scriptures, everyone flees.

- Where's the crowd?
- Where are those Jesus healed?
- Where are James and Bartholomew?
- And--by the way, where is Peter?

Everyone is gone!

Maybe you can relate to this story. Maybe you know someone who left Jesus in the garden.

Personally I'm a little troubled this morning, because when I read this Scripture I feel like I have just fled the scene of a crime. Did you notice 14:51-52: The guy who fled the scene? Many scholars like to think this is Mark. But I'm not so sure. As much as Mark addresses me as the reader, I don't think the guy who fled is Mark. It's awkward that Mark put this one in the story.

I'm a little nervous this morning, because the only question I'm asking is:

- **Is it me?**
- **When have I turned and run away from God?**
- **When was I more concerned about saving my own skin rather than walking down the same road with Jesus?**
- **When have I been silent when I should have used speech?**
- **What would have been the benefit to God's kingdom if I had stayed with Jesus?**

Before us this morning sits Mark 14:27-65, a challenging reading of Scripture in every right. The disciples' betrayal of their closest teacher is bad enough. They fall apart.

And now we are presented with wondering where we are in this story. We are left to wonder if we are fellow flee-ers. But it doesn't all end right here--there is one more troubling part to this story. It's the confidence of the Sanhedrin! The Sanhedrin functioned really as a religious assembly made up of both Pharisees and Sadducees.

Convinced that they were doing the will of God, they do everything they can to bring Jesus to the cross, and--Jesus remains--silent. Now that's troubling to me!

Listen carefully this morning:

- **How often do we do things convinced that they are the will of God, only to be met with the silence of God?**
- **How many times do we run ahead of God with our own plans?**
- **How many things are done in the name of God that He might not want his name attached to?**

And so our reading of the Scripture ends where we began this morning (Silence): Those who are supposed to be Jesus' own people spit upon him, beat him, and mock him. And then the scene closes in silence and moves to another part of the story.

But the ending of 14:65 needs to be heard! In the face of violence we are greeted only with Jesus' silence.

But we must not confuse silence with the mere absence of words. For as Jesus remains silent, he still speaks to us today.

- How ironic that Jesus is told to prophesy just after he has prophesied that he would be betrayed.
- How ironic as we end this reading that a life defined by nonviolence would end with such remarkable violence.
- How much more ironic that a man known for his words would end his life in silence?

But silence may give us cause to hope.

1 Kings 19:9b-13a. And the word of the LORD came to him: "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

10 He replied, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too."

11 The LORD said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by."

Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. **12** After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. **13** When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.

You see the Cross is just around the corner. I've mentioned in some of the other lessons in this series "No Turning Back- Living the surrendered life" that Jesus is ultimately leading his disciples toward their own crosses. Jesus is preparing them for his mission. And through that challenge Mark challenges us to engage in the same relationship with Jesus that will transform our lives as he leads us to our own crosses so that he can prepare us for his mission to reconcile the world through Him in the 21st century.

May this be your prayer: You lived, Jesus, not by sword but by the Scripture. Yet I continue to live by what I want and easily take matters into my own hands, even when I'm attempting to do right things. Jesus, teach me to live your way. Teach me to have your goals and yes, teach me to hear the thin silence of your voice in my life. Amen!

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