

ANGELIC MESSAGES FOR OUR TIME
“BE SILENT”
Luke 1:11-20

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Old Zechariah hit the jackpot. He won the lottery. His one in 20,000 chance paid off. He got a once in a lifetime opportunity to enter the Holy of Holies where God is so real you can touch, feel, and taste him. He gets the privilege to celebrate that high priestly function. There, while burning incense to kill the smell of sin, Old Zechariah slipped in another prayer—a prayer of the heart, the hunger of the soul—a haunting question of a lifetime. He’d prayed it thousands of times before. It was the prayer of every Jewish man. It was a question really. “Why, O God, have Elizabeth and I remained childless?” That’s when it happened. Zechariah got a nine-month sentence to silence.

SILENCE. At first it seemed like a curse of life.

Sometimes we are stunned to silence. Zechariah is stunned to silence. The angel Gabriel showed up in person. He gave Zechariah a message that left him speechless. “If you want a son, go home and make one,” said Gabriel. And because you question how this can happen in your old age, you will not speak again until the baby is born. Zechariah says, “How is that possible? When will this happen and how can this happen? We’re too old to have children.” Sometimes life just leaves you speechless and what we ought to do in those moments is to stay quiet. Instead we start babbling like crazy, asking questions, wondering how, wondering when, and how’s it going to happen.

Sometimes things are so unexpected, so out of this world, so good that “we just don’t know what to say.” Have you ever felt that way? The greatest temptation is to start explaining, questioning.

Since Zechariah was struggling with his own belief, God decided it would be better for him to be thought a fool than to have him speak up and remove all doubt. So Zechariah “stop your babbling about how, when, why, are you sure, I don’t understand.” Go home and be quiet. You can’t even explain it to Elizabeth. So don’t even try. Sometimes silence is stunning. It leaves us speechless. It is a glorious day when we discover that some things just can’t be explained. So quit trying.

Sometimes we are silent because we are scared to death. Silence can be a source of fear. The sounds of silence scare us.

Can you picture this story in Luke, Chapter 1? Zechariah makes a living as a priest. What is a priest to do if he cannot talk? He makes a living with his lips.

Not a word out of his own mouth, not a single word. No wonder he is afraid.

I don't know how that rings with you but it's scary to me. It scares me to death. This time last year I was sitting in the office of a neuro-oncologist undergoing an examination, to assess the impact of a tumor on my brain. He asked those stupid questions that neurologists ask: What's your name? What day of the year is it? Who is the president of the United States? Touch your nose. Touch your toes (that took some effort).

When he got down to asking Sandy about changes of behavior she had observed, I interrupted. "Doc," I said, "let's get down to the facts—will this surgery affect my speech? I make my living talking."

I can't describe the relief I felt when he replied. "Your personality may change, but your speech should be fine." That's when Sandy said "His personality could use a little improvement." Silence. It can scare you to death.

SILENCE. It can be a gift from God.

When he could not speak to them, they realized he had seen a vision in the temple. Henri Nouwen has informed my spiritual life more than any other writer. In his book [The Way of the Heart](#), he talks about how God speaks in the silence. He says silence can do some powerful things for us. Among them are these.

Silence can become a pilgrimage to God.

Eastern religions have no doubts about the value of silence. Hindus, Buddhist, Zen, Chinese, all affirm that we come into harmony with God by finding an inner quietness. They have given us many good methods by which we can accomplish that. God is found in the quiet.

Western Christianity, on the other hand, wants us to do something, say something, be something. We are noisy about our faith. Confess Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior and do good things for others. In our noisy churches we use our busyness to bring us to the house of God but keep us away from the awesome presence of God.

The Lord is in his Holy Temple; let all the earth keep silence before him! How long is just one minute of silence in our noisy world?

Silence, it protects the inner fire of the spirit down in your soul. The Bible is full of it, all the way through.

Jeremiah says the word of the Lord came to me and I became his prophet and every time I spoke I got in such trouble that finally one day I just said to God, I'm not talking any more. But Jeremiah couldn't keep his resolve. There was a fire in

his belly put there by God and when he tried to be quiet, it would just burn within him. At last he laments *I am weary with holding it in; indeed I cannot* (Jeremiah 20:9).

John the Baptist said, *I baptize you with water but one greater than I is coming. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.* Is the fire of the Holy Spirit aflame in you? If not, what's caused the fire to go out? Busy—talking—running. It's one thing to 'blow smoke' and it's another thing to have the flame of the Holy Spirit deep within.

We have a word for it. It's all over our culture. We call it "Burn out." When the output exceeds the intake, we are destined to burn out. Henri says you ought to be stoking the fire inside of you. There comes a time to shut down the damper, stoke the coals, tend the fire, because the flame of God is the most important thing in your soul.

Silence, it prepares us to speak. You ought not to talk until you have been silent said Henri. There is a difference between having to say something, and having something to say. Henri Nouwen says it's only those who have spent quality time in silence that can speak with authenticity and passion. Silence makes you able to speak.

When Zechariah finally got out of nine months of silence and had the chance to speak again, he sang a song. You can read it in the last part of this first chapter. He had something to say.

Blessed be the God of Israel,
Who comes to set us free,
Who visits and redeems us,
And grants us liberty.
The prophets spoke of mercy
Of freedom and release;
God shall fulfill the promise
To bring our people peace.

Could there be in the silent spots of this worship service today, an angel speaking words of hope, words of peace, words of love, to every person here?

Listen. Listen. I hear the voice of an angel in our midst.