



St. Paul Lutheran Church

“Your Refuge from the Storm”

LifeGroup Study

July 21, 2024 Revelation 8:1-5; Psalm 62

READING RESOURCES: *Revelation and the End of All Things* by Craig R. Koester.

Community

TODAY'S THEME

Six seals have been broken. It's time for the seventh seal, the opening of the book and a picture of the end. There is silence in heaven for about half an hour.

WHAT DO WE WANT OUR SMALL GROUP TO KNOW?

When our life seems overwhelmed with chaos and terror, gloom and doom, Jesus is Lord of that and promises to meet us in it. When we're blown to the periphery and find ourselves far off center, stop. Be still, and listen for God. When we scatter as a natural response to circumstances beyond ourselves, stop and listen for God. Listen for God calling us to run to him and to cling to him. When we're overwhelmed with whatever it is that causes fear, we need to stop and be still. Be still and silent for about half an hour.

WHAT DO WE WANT OUR SMALL GROUP TO DO?

We want to take about 30 minutes each day for one week to experience silence and listen for God's voice. Each day will take us on a different path to the same place: silence. We want the God of peace and hope to meet us in our silence.

INTRODUCTION

Quotations about silence:

“Silence is a text easy to misread.” – A. Attanasio, *The Eagle and the Sword*.

“Tis better to be silent and be thought a fool, than to speak and remove all doubt.” – Abraham Lincoln.

“He who does not know how to be silent will not know how to speak.” – Ausonius.

“The eternal silence of these infinite places fills me with dread.” – Blaise Pascal.

“Silence is more musical than anything.” – Christina Rossetti.

“There is no need to go to India or anywhere else to find peace. You will find that deep place of silence right in your room, your garden or even your bathtub.” – Elisabeth Kubler-Ross.

In 1964, the Four Seasons topped the charts with a song called “Rag Doll.” On the flip side of that vinyl was another song called “Silence is Golden.” That song hit #11 on the charts in 1967 by a band called the Tremeloes. Silence is golden. The phrase may date all the way back to ancient Egypt. Throughout history, silence has been seen as laudable and desirable. The Wyclif Bible of 1382 says it this way: “Silence is made in heaven.”

In Revelation 8, the seventh seal is opened. The text says: “There was silence in heaven for about half an hour.” Today we're going to explore what's going on in the throne room of God.

ICEBREAKER

Why do you think we, as a culture, are so uncomfortable with silence? Talk about a time when you experienced an extended amount of real silence.

PRAY TOGETHER

Father God, we want to stop and pay attention to the still, small voice that leads us through life. We want to take the time to be quiet in your presence and receive the comfort and peace that only you can bring. We want to slow down and pray for the needs of so many all around us and around the world. We want your Kingdom to come and your will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.

Content

BACKGROUND: REVELATION 5-7

The passage from chapter 8 is so brief that some context is necessary. The context begins back in chapter 5 with an angel of the Lord holding a scroll. The scroll contains writing on both sides, and it is held fast with a series of seven seals.

The angel of the Lord asks the question, “Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?” John, the writer of Revelation, through profound tears of sadness (in verse 4, he “wept bitterly”), tells the reader that no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth is able to open the scroll, or look into it. This is cause for deep grief because the scroll contains good news.

One of the elders comforts John and tells him there is one who can open the scroll: The Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the Root of David, the Lamb of God, Jesus. This is grace, mercy and hope. Jesus will break the seals and open the scroll. He will make a way where there is no way. He will open up the good news. (– Adapted from *Revelation and the End of All Things*, by Craig Koester.)

REVELATION 8:1-5

(*Read Revelation 8:1-5 together.*) When we get to chapter 8, the last of the scroll's seven seals is broken. This reveals the first of seven trumpets, which announce more terrible things: hail, fire, poisoning of rivers and springs, locusts – even worse than before, just in case the reader isn't uneasy enough. The point in all of this is to encourage readers to put their trust in God, because apart from God there is no security.

Chapter 8 begins with half an hour of silence. Just enough time to catch our breath, or lull us into a false sense of security. Or not! Actually, this should give us a great sense of anticipation. The last seal is opened. Seven angels stand before God. Seven trumpets are issued to the angels. Something is about to happen.

Trumpets were used to warn, announce, proclaim; all of this is intended to arouse anticipation and wonder. This also invites worship and praise. There is a sense here that the people of God are being called into a state of worship, of perpetual praise for our great

God. The worship motif is further supported as another angel with a golden censer, an incense burner used in religious ceremonies, burns the incense. The smoke from the incense rises out of the censer and mingles with the prayers of the people. All of this takes place at the throne and rises before God.

DISCUSSION All of this buildup to the opening of the seventh seal is followed by “about a half hour” of silence. What do you make of that? What is God trying to say to us here? Do you think God speaks to us in silence? What does that sound like? Feel like?

GOING DEEPER: A SILENCE EXERCISE

Let’s take the next minute to enter into something that may be very foreign to some of us. We’re going to enter into silence. Of course it’s silly to think that we can enter into something profound in 60 seconds, but it’s a start.

First, we’ll be quiet together; or as quiet as we can be. Second, we’ll listen to all that’s around us, and move deeper toward what’s inside us. Third, we’ll listen for a stirring; not an actual voice, but a stirring beyond our own thoughts. Fourth, we’ll trust that God’s still, small voice can speak in many ways: through feelings, thoughts, ideas, and prompting. Sixty seconds of silence, and it begins now. Listen. (*Silence, for at least 60 seconds.*)

DISCUSSION Describe your experience of the last minute. Mind wander? Stomach growl? Distracted? New insights? New feelings? Anxious about the clock?

Revelation is a hope-filled book. It is a profound reminder of the majesty of God, and God’s faithfulness to us. It includes encouragement in the difficult, frightening times in our lives.

DISCUSSION Have you ever experienced God’s faithfulness in frightening times?

When fear threatens to overwhelm you, and you feel locked up tight in a dark room with no open windows and no air, Jesus is Lord over that and promises to meet you in it.

DISCUSSION When you are fearful, how do you deal with it? How is God able to meet us in our fear?

When your life seems overwhelmed with chaos and terror, gloom and doom, Jesus is Lord of that and promises to meet you in it. When you are blown to the periphery and find yourself far off center, stop. Be still, and listen for God. When you scatter as a natural response to circumstances beyond yourself, stop and listen for God. Listen for God calling you to run to him and to cling to him.

DISCUSSION Talk about a time when you were really blown off center.

Application

Let’s make this week an application of silence.

Monday: For 30 minutes of silence, find a quiet place to call God’s throne room. Sit for 30 minutes in silence, and simply listen.

In order to prepare for what you might hear, go back and read the passage from Revelation 8:1-5. Then just close your eyes and listen for God’s Holy Spirit to speak through these words to you.

Tuesday: For 30 minutes of silence, go back into the presence of God, and this time quietly name your fears. All of them. Quietly speak them out loud; name them and give them to God. God will meet you in your fears and provide a way through them.

Wednesday: For 30 minutes of silence, take a piece of paper or a journal with you and write down how God has met you so far in the week. Look back and acknowledge God’s faithfulness and take that with you into the rest of the day.

Thursday: For 30 minutes of silence, find a new venue. Explore a quiet place to walk. Walk around a lake, go to a park, go somewhere quiet, and just walk and listen for God to remind you of his faithfulness.

Friday: For 30 minutes of silence, pray for the specific needs of someone you know who is struggling. Be specific about how you are asking God to meet him or her in those needs. Let your heart be filled with gratitude for how God has both worked and will work in that person’s life.

Saturday: For 30 minutes of silence, find a dark place, light one candle, and focus on the light of Christ in your life and the difference that makes from day to day.

Come back to your group in a week and report what happened during your times of silence.

PRAY TOGETHER

We are thankful that you speak out of the silence into the realities of every day life. You speak peace and hope. You speak comfort and healing. In Jesus Christ you have changed everything. The Kingdom of heaven is at hand. You forgive sin and set us on the path that leads to redemption and reconciliation. We give you our thanks and praise. This week, speak to us through silence and help us to clearly hear your voice. Amen.

ADDITIONAL CONVERSATION AND REFLECTION

The Seals and the Trumpet

REVELATION 6–7

This text illustrates what happens when God eliminates sin from the earth. You get a sense that human history as we know it will be over, and God, in full power, will rule the world with mercy and justice. This is good news! We know, and rejoice in the fact, that Jesus is Lord of all now, and that one day God’s reign will be fully revealed. If the time of God’s fully-revealed reign is centuries from now, we are still called to live proclaiming that Jesus is Lord of heaven and earth in all that we say and do. This text is a reminder that God will eliminate everything in us and in all of creation that is sinful, hurtful, and destructive. It kindles the hope that one day, by God’s grace and power, hunger, thirst and tears will be no more.

Revelation 8:1-5 NLT When the Lamb broke the seventh seal on the scroll, there was silence throughout heaven for about half an hour. (2) I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and they were given seven trumpets. (3) Then another angel with a gold incense burner came and stood at the altar. And a great amount of incense was given to him to mix with the prayers of God's people as an offering on the gold altar before the throne. (4) The smoke of the incense, mixed with the prayers of God's holy people, ascended up to God from the altar where the angel had poured them out. (5) Then the angel filled the incense burner with fire from the altar and threw it down upon the earth; and thunder crashed, lightning flashed, and there was a terrible earthquake.