

Into the quiet

Teaching Notes

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Teaching 01: The Quiet Place

Text: Luke 5v15-16

- We live in a noisy world.
- Step outside – airplanes drone overhead, freeway noise travels for miles, delivery trucks blare, people are everywhere, talking, talking, talking...
- Research scientists are calling this new phenomenon “noise pollution.”
- The WHO claims it’s the second most lethal environmental toxin after air pollution, because of it’s impact on our health.
- If you think about it, in nature, if you’re out backpacking, anything loud is likely dangerous – an avalanche, or hurricane, or tsunami or predator...
- Any noise – which scientists define as unwanted sound – over a certain decibel level automatically triggers our body’s fight or flight system.
- That’s why when you get off a highway, you feel this strange mix of tired and on edge – your prefrontal cortex knows that’s just a semi with a broken muffler passing me, but your limbic system is just screaming – danger, danger.
- One study found that prescriptions for anxiety medication rise 28% for every 10-decibel increase in neighborhood noise.
- Not to mention all the “noise” of our culture – opinions and news alerts and controversy and in-fighting and outrage and lies and immorality and an incessant stream of distraction after distraction.
- And even the church is a bit noisy, right? We sing and preach and pray and talk... but rarely do we sit in the quiet before God and listen...
- But the path, or the Way of Jesus, is the ancient way of solitude.

Turn in your Bibles to Luke 5. (Read Luke 5v15-16)

Intro hook:

January 27, 1956.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. is sitting at his kitchen table in the middle of the night, about to walk away from his destiny.

This was still early in the civil rights movement, and Dr. King was not yet widely known.

He had been brought in to Montgomery, Alabama, to lead the bus boycott, following Rosa Park's courageous act of refusing to sit in the colored section of the bus.

But as the boycott dragged on, the ire of the mob was increasingly turned onto its leader.

With the rising tide of death threats, Dr. King was fearing not only for his life, but for his wife and daughter.

The day before, Dr. King had been arrested and jailed for driving 30 miles per hour in a 25-miles-per-hour zone.

That morning, he was released, but came home to another round of threatening phone calls.

The evening of the 27th, he could not fall asleep, so he got out of bed, made a pot of coffee, sat down in his kitchen, and began to pray to God in the quiet.

In a later sermon, he told the story this way:

“And I bowed down over that cup of coffee — I never will forget it. ... I

prayed a prayer, and I prayed out loud that night. I said, ‘Lord, I’m down here trying to do what’s right. ... But Lord, I must confess that I’m weak now. I’m faltering. I’m losing my courage.’ ... And it seemed at that moment that I could hear an inner voice saying to me, ‘Martin Luther, stand up for righteousness. Stand up for justice. Stand up for truth. And lo I will be with you, even until the end of the world.’”

In his biography of Dr. King, the Pulitzer Prize winning historian David Lewis makes the point that this was a defining moment in Dr. King’s life and, as a result, in the nation of America and far beyond.

Seam: *But. Imagine a hypothetical situation ...*

What if?

What if Dr. King had a smartphone? What if he sat down with his cup of coffee and disappeared into Twitter, or started working on his next TikTok video?

Or got an emergency text?

Or started reading the news and fuming over the latest op-ed?

Or what if he had a TV and just started binging a new series?

Would there have been a Dr. King? Would he have been able to hear God’s voice in the quiet and, from it, draw on God’s strength to continue the fight? Or would he have been sucked into the black hole of the digital age?

Hypothetical situation.

Seam: *But it has me thinking about our very real situation as the first generation to apprentice under Jesus in the digital age.*

What if the greatest threat to the Christian faith today isn’t secularism but distraction?

We live in an era where it's possible to go through your entire life and never be alone; even when we're "alone," we're on our phone or the internet or in our entertainment queue.

The cultural critic Cal Newport, in his book *Digital Minimalism*, writes, "It's now possible to completely banish solitude from your life."

The moment that most of us are ever alone, in a room or even in our car, we reach for the appendage of our device — check our texts, open social media, read the news, play music, put on a podcast, Google whatever.

Our devices keep us tethered to the world of noise.

And the threat of all this noise and distraction isn't just to our minds or even to our bodies; it's to our souls.

How many moments have I missed? Where God wanted to speak to me, or shape me, but I was distracted by my devices?

Set up: Is there a practice from the Way of Jesus that could position you and me to hear Jesus' voice in all the noise of the modern world?

Yes, it is the practice of solitude.

That night in his kitchen in Montgomery, Dr. King was tapping into a practice that is all over the life of Jesus.

Turn: *Turn in your Bibles to Luke 5. Let's read from verse 15...*

Luke 5v15-16

The news about [Jesus] spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses. But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.

The phrase "lonely places" is the English translation of the Greek word *eremos*.

But eremos can also be translated:

The desert

The deserted place

The desolate place

The solitary place

Or, my personal favorite, the quiet place

Jesus' world was very different from our highly urbanized world where in many places there are people as far as the eye can see. Most people in his day lived in small, rural villages; most were farmers on small plots of land; all lived within walking distance of the synagogue.

And outside the populated areas, there were vast tracts of empty, uninhabited land. Called "the eremos."

Jesus would regularly disappear out into that wide open space, all by himself, to pray.

Luke tells us "he often withdrew" to the eremos.

Listen to a few alternate translations of Luke 5.

Jesus himself frequently withdrew to the wilderness and prayed. (NET Bible)

Jesus often slipped away to be alone so he could pray. (NCV)

As often as possible Jesus withdrew to out-of-the-way places for prayer. (The Message)

When you read the gospels, you find story after story of Jesus, all alone, out in nature; just him, and God.

Seam: *In fact, when you read the Gospels, you notice in Jesus' life a rhythm of retreat and return...*