

"The Silent Word" An Advent Reflection based on Luke 1:5-25;57-80 delivered by the Rev. Alison Andrea Young on the Second Sunday in Advent, December 7, 2025 at the First Congregational UCC of Onkama, Michigan.

There is, of course, in our culture a disconnect between what is our experience of silence and what could be called "sheer silence" that is the kind of silence described in the story of Elijah, hiding at the mouth of a cave in 1 Kings 19. It is the one time that silence is mentioned when talking about the Prophets! Here in our morning's scripture we have Zechariah struck with silence until the birth of his son because he did not believe the angel of the Lord, Gabriel, when he was told of this good news.

Even when we try to be silent, we hear the sound of the birds, the chattering of the squirrels in the trees, the geese flying overhead, the sound of our own breathing—a dog barking in the distance. Sheer silence would be somewhat frightening, because it would mean a lack of living things. We can learn from this. It is not enough to find a quiet place in nature and close our eyes to hear God. We really must strip ourselves of all of our inner noise, as well, so that we can hear what God is asking of us.

When I was in college, Simon and Garfunkel's signature song "The Sound of Silence" came out and was wildly popular. It is now a classic. It has been recorded and rerecorded by many vocal artists since then. Sometimes we have heard it so often we don't listen too closely to Paul Simon's words, which are absolutely brilliant.

"The main thing about playing the guitar was that I was able to sit by myself and play and dream," Simon shared in an interview with *Playboy* (quote via Ultimate Classic Rock). "And I was always happy doing that. I used to go off in the bathroom, because the bathroom had tiles, so it was a slight echo chamber. I'd turn on the faucet so that water would run – I like that sound, it's very soothing to me – and I'd play. In the dark."

*Hello, darkness, my old friend / I've come to talk with you again*, the song begins against a pensive pluck of strings, mirroring Simon's state at the song's inception. The song immediately grabs the attention, its words casting vague, but stirring imagery across the delicate acoustics. *Because a vision softly creeping / Left its seeds while I was sleeping / And the vision that was planted in my brain / Still remains / Within the sound of silence*

“Really the key to ‘The Sound of Silence’ is the simplicity of the melody and the words, which are youthful alienation,” Simon once explained the tune’s meaning to *NPR* (quote via [Ultimate Classic Rock](#)). “It’s a young lyric, but not bad for a 21-year-old. It’s not a sophisticated thought, but a thought that I gathered from some college reading material or something.”

“It wasn’t something that I was experiencing at some deep, profound level – nobody’s listening to me, nobody’s listening to anyone – it was a post-adolescent angst,” Simon continued, “but it had some level of truth to it and it resonated with millions of people.”

The narrator has no one to talk to and the only thing that understands him is the darkness and his own loneliness. *In restless dreams I walked alone / Narrow streets of cobblestone*. But the song reaches beyond the perspective of a single narrator, a flash of light revealing a mass of people, humanity all seeking refuge in their own darkness and their own silence.

*And in the naked light I saw / Ten thousand people, maybe more / People talking without speaking / People hearing without listening / People writing songs that voices never share / No one dared / Disturb the sound of silence*, the chilling verse plays, illustrating a near, all-too-real future in which interactions become all the more surface-level and indifference continues to grow.

“Fools,” said I, “You do not know / Silence like a cancer grows / Hear my words that I might teach you / Take my arms that I might reach you,” the duo sings a wake-up call to no avail. *But my words like silent raindrops fell / And echoed in the wells of silence*.

“The Sound of Silence” comes to a close with a warning, pointedly calling out the all-consuming consumerism and using those already lost to it as an example of what’s to come if we continue to find solace in the silence. *And the people bowed and prayed / To the neon god they made / And the sign flashed out its warning / In the words that it was forming / And the sign said, “The words of the prophets / Are written on the subway walls / And tenement halls / And whispered in the sounds of silence.”*<sup>1</sup>

There is nothing truly silent about a baby, or birthing a baby, of course, but the pure audacity of God to place his Divine Word on this earth as a helpless innocent child, is breathtaking. The Gospel of John says it all:

***1** In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. **2** He was with God in the beginning. **3** Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. **4** In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. **5** The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome<sup>[a]</sup> it.*

***6** There was a man sent from God whose name was John. **7** He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. **8** He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.*

***9** The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. . . .*

***14** The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

Amen.

© 2025 by the Rev. Alison Andrea Young

<sup>1</sup> (quote via [\*Ultimate Classic Rock\*](#)).