

The Still, Small Voice

I started this reflection with a more provocative piece about prayer, but then I had a moment of wondering whether the first of these reflections should be edgy and confrontational, the better perhaps to stimulate discussion, or pastoral and reflective? And I remembered my own 'sermon' about the divisive nature of social media, and how it is manipulated to create discord because that leads to more debate, so I decided to go with the calmer version.

Today's service talks a lot about words and hints at the need for no words, the beauty of silence, the need to pause in our busy days of action and listen for the still, small voice of God.

Monday was World Suicide Prevention Day. The day gives organizations, government agencies and individuals a chance to promote awareness about suicide, mental illnesses associated with suicide, and ways of preventing suicides. There was a piece on the morning news talking about this issue and one of the men they spoke to said it was so important that people listen. Just listen, not give advice, or try to cheer the person up, but just listen intently to what the depressed person was saying.

A reflection I read on Monday pointed out that the first miracle Jesus performed was not walking on water or feeding thousands of people, it was healing someone with "an unclean spirit", a first century description of mental illness. 'Then, as now, such persons were often among the most isolated and vulnerable people of their communities. Yet there are more accounts of Jesus' caring for persons with mental illness than all other healing stories combined.' (www.ucc.org/daily_devotional) Jesus as always was being impartial, non-judgemental, caring. When Jesus heals he doesn't say many words; he touches people, often with his own spit; he's not scared of the nitty gritty, the bodily fluids, or the patient listening required.

In these days of instant news and constant information, who stops to simply listen? Who listens with an open heart and no agenda? Bella Bathurst in her book *Sound* suggests it is counsellors, but also cab drivers and hairdressers, and many churches provide listening services where people can drop in just to have someone listen to them.

We do well to heed the words of James – the tongue is a fire which cannot be tamed; it can bless *and* curse, and learn when to hold our tongues the better to listen - to listen to others and to the still small voice of God. '...to properly listen to someone – drop everything, sit down, forget everything except the person in front of you and what they're saying – is an act of communion.' (*Sound*, p195)

The Still, Small Voice

by Charles Wesley

Open, Lord, my inward ear,
 And bid my heart rejoice;
 Bid my quiet spirit hear
 The comfort of thy voice:
 Never in the whirlwind found,
 Or where earthquakes rock the place, —
 Still and silent is the sound,
 The whisper, of thy grace.