

Scripture Readings :

OT : Psalm 42

NT : Mark 15:1-5

Luke 22:39-46

GOD OF SILENCE

(A Reflection by Rev. Dr. I.S.Tuwere)

[Bose ni Wasewase ko Viti kei Rotuma e Niusiladi.
Saturday 24th July 2010 at 9 30 am, Hamilton]

I'm using the word 'silence' in its broad meaning or sweep. Not only to stop talking or to shut up, but silence as an attitude, a style or form of life. Not escape from life, from where the battle is going on, but retreating from it in order to go back to it, to the midst of life. It is like taking a backward step in order to advance.

We now live in a world that is full of noise. A world that allows little time for waiting and reflection. A world that is incredibly fast in its different operations, a world of science-based technology, of electronic devices.

We now live with three closely related explosions: the population explosion, the knowledge explosion and the information or 'noise' explosion. A world of stereo-sets, of newspapers and magazines, of radio and television. Of computers and modern forms of communication.

But it seems ironical that in spite of the high quality of our mass media, our knowledge of one another does not seem to get any better. In many cases, it is getting worse and worse. The reality and message of the Tower of Babel is with us still and is gathering speed all the time. For we build up our mass media with the express purpose of improving our knowledge and understanding of one another. But we do not seem to be heading in that direction. More and more people get confused than ever before. Alienation, depression, loneliness and emptiness seem to be the order of the day.

We now go through July, coming to the end of it. This month is known as *vula icukicuki* in Fijian – month for digging trenches for yams. Tomorrow will be the 9th Sunday after Pentecost in our Christian calendar. And as we go through this period of time, we are faced with the present disorder of the world. In the midst of this disorder we as a Christian community see **an order** that has already been established, the order of 'silence', the silence of God. And this is found in the text from our reading this morning:

*“Pilate asked Him again, “ Have you no answer?
See how many charges they bring against you.
But Jesus made no further reply, so that Pilate
was amazed”.
(Mark 15:4-5)*

Pilate most probably was expecting Jesus to defend Himself at this crucial moment. This was the point of encounter. The encounter between the worldly kingdom on the one hand and the reign of God on the other.

And to all these shoutings and accusations, Jesus stood speechless, ‘unable’ to defend Himself. This amazed the Roman governor, representative of the state. He could not do anything but stood there in wonder and amazement. And I cannot blame him.

As a governor, his world is the world of news; of headlines. This is the moment when he expects Jesus to speak up and defend Himself. Yet the Lord remained silent. And this silence was all that He had to defend Himself with.

Silence for Pilate at this crucial moment was unthinkable. He was unfamiliar with it – unacceptable. Now, it was breaking into his territory. The eternal breaking into history to set in a new order and to create anew. Silence carried the day. For Jesus went on to the cross and died there. When the shoutings and cries of anger died down, Jesus was left alone on the cross in silence. But it is not merely silence. For the cross is the mighty deed of God that turns the world upside down and offers mankind and the whole of creation a new way, the only way that leads on to Life.

But the cross of Christ stands as an utter failure. It expresses the weakness of God – his powerlessness. And this is the power that brings life with all its promise, fullness and assurance. **It is the power of love, not the love of power.** The cross is the event that brings together the failure and foolishness of God on the one hand and his power and authority on the other. It is failure and foolishness that is chosen by God himself. For this, God is in complete command of the situation. Not Pilate or Herod or any Roman authority at any time. It is God who is in full command.

I’m always inclined to think that the people who really move things and have great influence in society are not so much those (if I may borrow a military term) who are first-in-command as those who are second-in-command.

No so much the Prime Minister or the Minister who goes around delivering speeches, as the writer or the secretary who writes his speeches. Not so much those in power as the technicians of the total power-structure in a given situation. Not so much the president of any organization as the men and women who stand behind him or her with their advice and support.

Paths of the seconds-in-command are in many respects the path of silence. They do not make headlines, the entertainer does, so as the Prime Minister or Chairman. But we must also point out that there are all sorts of seconds-in-command. Some are good and some are evil. And we see examples of these in the history of a nation like our home-country, Fiji or any organization. For Christians and the Christian community as a whole, the meaning and purpose of silence is partly found in the story of David for example, part of his prayer we heard in Psalm 42 in our OT lesson. David was chosen and anointed King over Israel but he did not try to snatch it away from Saul. Instead, he followed the silent way. When he was hunted down by Saul and his men to kill him, he did not seek to fight back but waited and in his waiting, he did not lose touch with his God.

Jesus had all the rights in the world to claim equality with his Father. Instead he followed the silent way :

“...though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even on a cross” (Phil. 2:6-8)

Jesus is the deputy or the second in command in the full healthy sense of the word. Following his example, the Church as a community is called to be God's deputy in the world. The English dictionary says deputy means someone who has all the ability and know-how for the most senior position in his/her field but who willingly steps down and gives support and service to the one holding it. In every sense, Jesus was God's deputy. The true mark of the Church of Jesus Christ is not so much the number of people it has as its willingness and readiness to be God's deputy in the world. By its very nature, the Church of Jesus Christ is a small group of committed and dedicated people who look to Christ in the first place as he is pointing to the world. Today in the Pacific and in this land of Aotearoa we need dedicated people - pastors, priests and ministers who stand ready to be deputies, ready to support, ready to give and to turn around at the Lord's command.

All things that give meaning, direction and purpose, influence and stability in life come from this delicate world of silence. The calmness of the hills and mountains. The growth and budding of lovely flowers. The flowing in and

ebbing out of the ocean's tide. The working of the brain and beating of the heart. The silence of a persevering Spirit.

We have been talking about silence as an area where we may find the way of God. What about noise? Is noise the opposite of silence? Am I saying that we have to get rid of the noise – making our voice loud and clear in the affairs of society? Well, the answer is no. In Jesus, noise is not the opposite of silence. We must speak out where there is injustice. We have to defend the rights of the minorities, the poor and the outcast. We still need to talk in conferences and assemblies. Silence and noise in Jesus are not opposites. They compliment one another. But in all that we speak or do as Christians we do this in the courage and the humility of the silence of Jesus.

Henri Nouwen in one of his books has this to say about silence:

"Silence is a gift, one which is promising in the true sense of the word. The promise of this silence is that new life can be born. It is this silence which is the silence of peace and prayer, because you are brought back to the other who is leading you. In this silence, you lose the feeling of being compulsive and find yourself a person who can be himself/herself along with other things and other people...In this silence, the false pretenses fade away and you can see the world again with a certain distance and in the midst of all your cares, you can pray with the Psalmist: "Unless the Lord builds the house, those who labor it labor in vain. Unless the Lord guards the city, the guard keeps watch in vain."

Into that silence we commit ourselves this morning as we talk and listen and deliberate. We bring ourselves before the silence of God that prepares us for the breaking in of the crucified Lord and his resurrection-presence.

Amen.

