

## Sound and Silence

Midday winter darkness greeted me as I tightened my grip on my books after school, heading from junior high to the church about five blocks away. My friends lingered to talk, or go together to club meetings—but I left alone, hurrying along wet streets to outrun the deluge that was surely coming.

At the church I walked under the entrance arch toward large wooden doors I pushed to swing open, then paused to put some weight behind the next set of doors into the sanctuary, but not into warmth. It was as cold inside as it was outside. Not only cold, but dark. I found my way in the darkness down the side aisle touching pew after pew to find my way.

Setting my books into the front pew, I breathed in the remnants of candle wax, floor polish, and old hymnals, put my music on the organ rack, and snapped on the light under the keyboards to illumine the pedals. Then I slid up the heavy, dusty tambour cover to reveal the black, yellow, red and white stops above three keyboards. I centered myself in the middle of the seat so I could reach every stop. I pushed the switch in the stillness, and there was a thunk beneath me, then the whoosh of air as the organ blower filled the chest with pressurized air.

Then I turned to the worn hymnal (the best for music stands) and thumbed to page 8, “All Hail the Power of Jesus’ Name,” set the piston for congregational singing, and launched into the hymn with my cold fingers on the Swell organ.

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*Reflection by Rev. Catherine Fransson*

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*All hail the power of Jesus' name, let angels prostrate fall.  
Bring forth the royal diadem and crown him Lord of all;  
Bring forth the royal diadem and crown him Lord of all!*

At first I played as if for a prelude, and then the first stanza as I warmed up. Then I changed the registration to something bolder, and finally, on the fourth verse, I coupled the Great to the Swell organ, shoved in the *crescendo* pedal, slowing to a majestic pace to close grandly with “and crown Him Lord of all!”

I held my hands aloft, listening to the reverberations echo throughout the large room, sounding from the pipes themselves into the far corners of the balcony and back again from ceiling to wall to choir loft, until finally absorbed once again into the vibrating pipes themselves. Over my left shoulder was my silhouette, giant sized against the far wall, projected by the light on the pedals beneath me. I stared a while at my shadow.

Silence. Slowly, I heard the sibilance of tires on wet streets, turned to look at rainwater streaming down outside the yellow-gold stained glass of the large window to my right. Rain. And darkness. Sound and silence.

In these moments I grew from a lonesome teenager into a witness to the sacred, to being itself, and to the power of sound, the power of silence.

This silence was not empty. It was fulsome. Not bleak, but promising. It took me out of the barrenness of walking alone in the rain, and sitting in an empty church, to the community of saints singing together, reminding ourselves we are not alone, as I was not. My mood had changed from solitude to community, from emptiness to a spirit of fullness.

And so I was ready to begin my practice—of pedals, linking fingers from key to key, from notes to lines, and from lines to phrases, and to music. Music served more than sound to me. And silence was more than emptiness. Music with silence, and silence itself, were Spirit.

It took me years to appreciate this rhythm of sound and silence, silence and sound. A signal to me to listen well, for God might well speak. God, the *still, small voice* in the silence, the hush of angels' wings, and the presence of the Holy.

You can find this remarkable Presence yourselves. In the space following a sermon or homily, where sometimes you are asked to hold silence for a time, and everyone sits and waits, listening for the Word for themselves. We often hold silence after the proclamation of scripture for the same reason: we're listening for the word that is there for us, the Word for this moment, this day.

Now I seek silence wherever I can find it, in an empty church, a deep forest, even in my home, putting down my book, caressing my cat, waiting for the dark, turning on lights or lighting candles, simply waiting for wisdom. If faith is a relationship with the Mysteries of God, we must learn to hear God's voice. God's many voices. One of God's voices is music. And one is the *still small voice*. Silence itself.

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