

North Main, 2.4.18

TrustInGNM2418

Title: *Be Still and Know . . .*

Texts: Psalm 46:10. Scripture Reading, Psalm 46

“Be still and know . . .” (Psalm 46:10). Four simple words. But not so simple to accomplish.

It was a perfect summer Friday: seventy-five degrees sunshine. The lawn was mowed. The lines in the grass were straight. The air smelled of grass. I was on the porch, a Diet Coke within reach, a book on my lap. I silently repeated the Lord’s Prayer. Perfect. For about three minutes.

Then a neighbor fired up his leaf blower. By Stauffer Park, construction equipment shifted to reverse, triggering an annoying back up beeper. Two houses east, a dog barked. Sirens urgently screeched their way north out of town. A second dog barked harmony with the first one.

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I was at Amigo Centre seeking stillness and solitude. A weekend family reunion was in progress. Noisy table games enhanced relationships. They had a right to their commotion. I exited for seclusion and silence. I circled west through the pines and east to the marsh walk. I arrived at the octagon on the marsh. Laid down. Rested my head on my arm. The sun warmed my face and soul. Silence. Perfect. For about three minutes.

A plane flew over. Then a second one. A dog barked in the distance. Then another one. Semis dиеseled on M66. It was early fall. A combine churned through a cornfield. Someone was sitting in their shotgun for deer season.

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Psalm 46 is a Zion Psalm. In Zion texts, God is elevated:

God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.
Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change,
though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea;
though its waters roar and foam,
though the mountains tremble with its tumult.
(Psalm 46:10)

The end of Psalm 46 forms an “inclusio,” a bookend to the beginning:

Be still, and know that I am God!
I am exalted among the nations,
I am exalted in the earth.”
The Lord of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our refuge.
(Psalm 46:10-11)

Zion, psalms acclaimed God, evoked history, pride, faith in the Israelites. The physical Zion

was, at various intervals, located on the Temple Mount, or all of Jerusalem. For Jews, it was and is the most holy place in all the world, viewed as their physical connection with God. Observant Jews still recite the Amidah (the “standing prayer”) three times a day, morning, afternoon and evening, facing Zion. They pray for: 1) the rebuilding of the Holy Temple, 2) the restoration of the Temple service, 3) the redemption of the world, 4) the coming of the Messiah.

The reader hears such things in the body of Psalm 46:

There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
the holy habitation of the Most High.
God is in the midst of the city; it shall not be moved;
God will help it when the morning dawns.
The nations are in an uproar, the kingdoms totter;
he utters his voice, the earth melts.
The Lord of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our refuge.
(Psalm 46:4-7)

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As I have noted, care must be taken to not overanalyze the psalms. They were to be read in worship. The Psalms appeal to emotions, creativity, imagination. “Be still and *know*.” One word, of these four, trips me up: How does one *know* God: creator of the universe, all that is, all knowing, always present?

I *know* that you are sitting in the pews. I *know* that Roger is on the sound board. I *know* that Rhonda is on Power Point. People sometimes begin conversations about God with “I know for a fact . . . When I consider the immensity of God, how can I *know for a fact* that God is God? But I’m getting ahead of myself. The phrase for today is, “Be still and know . . .”

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I’m slightly addicted to silence. To be whole, I need to understand who God is, who I am in relationship to God. It is in silence that God’s voice is most: clear, definitive. I gather silence wherever and how ever I can: by closing my office door, turning off the stereo, turning off the car radio, sitting on my porch, wandering at Amigo, sitting with eyes closed. But there is an internal silence that can be attained midst the roil and ruction of life. Silence is a state of mind as much as a perceptible reality. It requires discipline. It’s a spiritual exercise. I find silence where two or three are gathered. I find silence in crowds of people. But I find silence best alone.

Be still and know. Be still and know. Be still and know. This psalm was recited after the eruption of Mount St. Helens, after the 1987 Southern California earthquake, after the December 2005 Indian Ocean tsunami, after 9/11.

After all that tumult, violence and death, people relied on “Be still and know . . .” Humans, after great calamities, often turn to God and silence. I quote this psalm as a prayer when words escape

me, holding the person or situation in my mind. I quote it for you individually and for this congregation. I quote it during prayer, as a way of refocusing when my attention wanders. I quote it when I worry about my children and their children.

Be still and know. Frank Clarence Finkel knew a lot of things about a lot of things and was disillusioned by most things and tired of the incessant, inescapable noise of life. Unable to find his place in modern society, he went into the woods with little more than a Bible and the clothes on his back. Just disappeared. For twenty-seven years almost no human contact.

To disguise his location, he rarely lit open fires, walked over rocks and roots to avoid leaving footprints. He became a mythical figure. People claimed to have seen him when they had not, claimed they had talked with him when they had not. Family and friends thought he was dead.

A reporter finally tracked Frank down for an interview. Frank said that the moon was his minute hand the seasons his hour hand. "Here I and the Lord are lords of the woods," he said. "I am content. My attention span has increased. My depression, hyperactivity and aggression are gone. My hearing is sharper. Alone with the Great Alone, I hear the slightest whispers of God."

Frank spoke of becoming indifferent to: the opinions of others, the metrics of the world's success, first impressions, his own ego, cultural expectations.

And then he said, "There isn't nearly enough of nothing anymore. With technology there is always something. The nothing of this place leads to stillness—where I can hear God."

Few of us will go to this end to achieve stillness. But that doesn't mean it's not important. Don't forget, we follow a Jesus who frequently went away to still places to be still and know. Jesus went away to understand God's will and gain courage to do it. What might God be up to you in your life? At NM? I know of no better way to discern such things than to: be still and think; be still and pray; "Be still and know . . ."

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