

I've learned in life that women talk – men listen...?

Men don't want to talk about it! Silence is their domain.

Women don't like the silence! They want men to talk...but
they want men to listen too. That's two-for-two.

That's batting a thousand! Ahhh!

Awkward silence fills the space in most relationships.

Our scripture from Amos is **NOT** comforting; **NOT** hopeful.

We avoid reading Amos because he was known as the prophet of
doom and gloom.

He warned Israel that God would destroy his people because
they failed to heed his commandments;
they refused to live up to God's standards.

And Amos was darn near right – in the beginning of this 8th chapter he announces,
“The end has come upon my people Israel” (8:2 NRSV).

The Israelites didn't die outright, but their relationship to God was changed;
they were captured and went into exile.

Thus begins a new chapter in the history of God's people.

Scripture – Amos 8:11, 12

I love a quiet evening watching the sun set, the blue-black of the evening sky appear with the stars beginning to shine. The world heading into its earthly slumber. **No sounds! Silence.**

I love a quiet morning, time to be by myself. A time of silent reflection about life, about God, about who I am and where I'm going. **No words! Silence.**

I love time to read a book in pure **silence.**

I love walking outdoors, enjoying the fresh air, the trees and plants, clouds in the sky. **Silence** permeates everything.

I guess I don't much like noise and distractions, particularly during quiet times. Perhaps I learned this in Kindergarten -- when we had to take a nap no one was allowed to make any noise.

I don't like it when my cell phone goes off in the middle of a good nap.

We either like or we don't like silence. We either like time alone, time to be quiet, or we prefer to have people around, noise in the background, something that tells us we are not alone.

Silence might suggest tranquility and awe. We listen to the water lapping at the edge of a lake; waves rolling into shore and sense a peace. Susan Muto writes that "Silence can be an escape from the functional responsibilities and physical demands of listening and conversing with colleagues, friends, and family members. But it can also be an opening to God." **We all want an opening to God!**

What do you want? Peace appeals to me but not so much that I'm ready to rest in peace. Making a little noise is how I remind myself I'm alive.

I don't know if silence equals peace. Sometimes the silence seems deafening and we hunger for some voice or show of life. Does God have to speak out loud, so we hear, in order for us to know God is there? Is it God's voice I want to hear to know I'm alive?

Perhaps we should look at silence as a brief timeout. We give children time out when their behavior warrants it. We adults need time out from our busy lives and our culture's fast pace. A brief time out in a quiet place can indeed restore calm and peace to our souls.

In ancient times, people went to the desert for time out; to find a relationship between themselves and God. Some stayed for years wrestling with God in the silence. It is called the *via negativa*, the negative way, for nothing positive seems apparent. However, for those who entered the negative way they emerged with a deep sense of serenity.

Perhaps it is this serenity we're looking for; that opening to God we need. The more we can relate to God, the more we can communicate with God; the more we sense God's presence, the more serenity we might find in our lives.

I'd go for that. That sounds good. But I'm not sure it's realistic. We can't go off into the desert for years like the early Desert Fathers. And it wasn't all serenity.

They wrestled with their demons too. They struggled in the silence; it wasn't always peaceful as we might imagine it. That's true in our lives as well.

In our Anthem, the words sung were about letting our heart be quiet, our thoughts still; let the distractions cease so I can hear you Lord.

I believe it's difficult to choose silence when communication is available. We demand information in our world, not reflection. Communication seems more important than contemplation.

And yet, **silence communicates** -- it's a basic structure of relationships -- when the other is silent we interpret the meaning.

There are two sides to the coin of silence: There is one side we might perceive as a good; peaceful, tranquil, restful, restoring our souls, but there is another side of that same coin – where silence is harsh, with suffering and pain.

In a recent article in the Christian Century, author Sara Maitland describes experience of silence like this: “Silence is a huge force; it strips you down and makes you face your own smallness, fretfulness, and vulnerability. It is not about peace... It is about radical self-transformation – about grace,... beauty and awe.”

Perhaps God, by being silent, is buffeting our attempts to control people; to control situations and directions of our lives. The failure of speech in relationships is painful. When we run out of words, or we think God is silent, then and perhaps

only then **can God be God**. Maybe that's the point of surrender -- which just might, bring us to worship God without our controlling interests.

God's word fell silent on Golgotha. The earth shook, rocks split open, the curtain of the temple was torn in two; and humanity stood there at the foot of the cross speechless. Silence at the time of death is so loud. Words are lost; we don't hear anything -- we don't say anything. We are stone silent. God renders us speechless! We are overcome with grief!

Three days later Jesus, the Word from God, rose to break the silence. Even though Jesus disappeared later his words did not; they echo today and forevermore.

Amos said God would send a famine of hearing the words of the Lord, but God's did a new thing in sending his Son Jesus Christ. His presence is still here, now, today, in the words of our worship service; in the liturgy, the hymns and anthem, the sermon, and in the silence of our thoughts, meditations and prayers.

We don't anticipate God's word to us being silent; We don't anticipate God hiding his face from us, but in the Hebrew Bible there are thirty references where God hides his face. God takes a time out – God withdraws—so the people can learn once again what they once had but forgotten.

On the Mount of Transfiguration, God said, “This is my Son, my Beloved. Listen to him.” Some said it sounded like thunder, but it wasn't a shout; it was a whisper.

The revelation of God comes as a whisper.

It sounds silent!

We have to lean forward to catch it;

we have to still ourselves and trust that what we hear

is the word of God.

Here are a few opportunities to hear God speaking in silence –

1. Go to God in prayer and don't say anything, just listen.
2. Reflect on the mysteries of the world and our God, alone, and in silence.
3. Receive the gifts of God into a silent but grateful heart.
4. Visit a shut-in or someone hospitalized and just be with them, in silence.
5. Hold the hand of someone who is dying.
6. Read Scripture in silence and let it wash over your entire being

And trust that God is speaking in all the silence. Amen.