

Ecclesiastes: Preacher of Surprising Joy

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Session 4/5

Silence

- Funeral mass for Louise Hastings 1998
- Silence in biblical worship
- Genesis 8:20-21
 - silent act of ritual worship
 - Noah does not speak until end of Genesis 9
- 1 Kings 19:9-12
 - God in the still small voice(?)
- Israelit Knohl, *The Sanctuary of Silence*
 - Israelite priests and the “sanctuary of silence”

Meletios Webber

“One might guess that the heart is capable of constant awareness of God, and we can see that awareness, albeit in a weakened state, whenever we quiet the mind long enough to hear the silence. ...

The language of the heart is silence – not a bleak, empty silence, but a profound and meaningful silence that ceaselessly sings the glory of God”.

Meletios Webber (cont)

“In the world at large, there is a silence which is simply the lack of all noise. This is a negative silence, a silence waiting to be filled. However, in the spiritual life we discover another, much more valuable sort of silence, and this is the silence which is the voice of God. The two sorts of silence sound similar, but they are not the same. Within this silence we are bathed in the goodness and love of God.

Silence is the language of God. Everything else is a mistranslation”.

Small group discussion

- Where do you find joy in life?
 - **Be concrete and specific! Or else!**
- Where do/did you find joy in *work*?
- Where do you find joy in *church*?

The center in wisdom literature?

- Where is the theological center in wisdom literature?
- Two main theological emphases in wisdom literature
 - anthropocentric → understand the self
 - theocentric → creation and God
- How are these related?
- ***Character***
 - William Brown, *Character in Crisis*
 - knowledge of God and knowledge of self go together
 - develop the self in relation to how we perceive the world
- **Wisdom literature is about the formation of character**

Reconstructs Character

- challenges traditional wisdom
 - breaks connection between wisdom-righteousness and prosperity
- difficult to form character in this kind of a world
 - everything is hebel
 - wisdom money righteousness guarantee nothing
 - disintegration of family
 - opportunity and volatility
 - loss of meaning and moral vision
 - Toto I don't think we're in the golden age any more

New virtues

- **Joy**
- Quiet
- Simplicity
- Risk
- Reverence

Quiet

- Eccl 5:1-7
 - Eccl 5:1 – listen
 - Eccl 5:2 – slow to speak / not much to say
 - Eccl 5:3 - ? fools talk all the time
 - Eccl 5:4 – do what you say
- Eccl 9:17 – speak quietly
- Why do we use so many words?
- Transcendence of God
- RW – manipulate God or others

Simplicity

- Eccl 5:10-12
 - contentment
 - work and rest
 - food and drink
 - fellowship

Risk

- do not know the future? everybody dies?
- why do anything? paralyzed by worry
- Eccl 11:1-6
 - risk
 - share
 - ? diversify?
 - do not know the future
 - do not know what God is doing

Reverence

- Eccl 3:11-15 – cannot grasp or change what God is doing
- Eccl 5:7 – difficult verse
 - perhaps desires and plans?
- *Eccl 7:15-18 – not too righteous or too wise
 - moderation? or a new approach?
- Eccl 8:10-13 – prosperity of the wicked?
 - those who fear God receive joy
- Eccl 12:13-14 – not part of original work
 - fear God and keep commandments

Fear or Reverence?

- Hebrew **r-'-h* = fear
 - be afraid of God?
 - terror?
 - ***reverence**
 - more than “reverence” but less than “be afraid”
- We cannot grasp God
 - God acts and gives
 - We do not always see or understand
 - “God is good and loves mankind”

Reverence

“To fear God is to embrace one's creaturely status as well as acknowledge the impenetrably enduring work of God, who freely extends the blessings of life to finite, ephemeral beings” (*Character*, 145)

“The stand in awe before the God of mystery is to position one's character in relation to God, as opposed to defining correct behavior that presumes the ways of God...”

Not only does reverence for God correct the rigid logic and extremes of the individual enterprise, it constitutes the source from which all virtue and right conduct are to flow. Qohelet has given godly reverence its orthodox due without reducing it to primitive terror, on the one hand, or human pretense, on the other” (146)

Reverence (cont)

- Be good? bad? in between?
 - new stance
 - reverence → character
- God is God and we are not
 - I am human and so are you
 - (See Woodruff)
- Respect and accept that
- Genesis 3
- Reverence ↔ faith? trust?

Reverence – the forgotten virtue

- Phil Woodruff, *Reverence: Renewing a Forgotten Virtue*
- Federation of Churches and Synagogues prayer breakfast 2002(?)
- “Begins in a deep understanding of human limitations”
- Opposite is to think you can act like a god
- “where light comes from by looking at shadows”
 - **Irreverence** helps us understand **reverence**

Reverence (cont)

- Capacity for three emotions at the right time
 - Awe
 - Fear
 - Shame
- Reverence expressed more in silence than in speech

Name that practice!

- Can you think of a Christian discipline or practice that somehow includes everything that Qohelet advocates?
 - Joy
 - Silence
 - Simplicity
 - Reverence
 - Risk(?)