

bread for the journey

Do you remember ...

Paul Simon and Art Garfunkel's classic "The Sounds of Silence" from 1964? Most of you are too young to remember 1964 but not too young to remember its lyrics.

I have been thinking about matters of substance versus matters of style. Ours is a culture that lightly puts *style* over *substance*. I need not prove that to you; we live in it and experience it every day. Style matters. Substance? Not so much. Rosecrance is intentional about putting substance over style. Our motto and brand—"Life's Waiting" unabashedly proclaims it. Recovery from substance abuse is a critical matter of substance over style. I am certain the church shares this concern. You are a voice in the wilderness crying out on behalf of a message of justice and grace.

Fifty some years after the fact, the "Sounds of Silence" bears a haunting quality. It means different things to different people. It depends upon who is listening; it depends upon one's own experiences. But it gently tells the truth. Stop. Listen for the truth. I suggest you "dial" it up. Sit back. Listen.

After listening to it for the umpteenth time, let me share what the words of this old song sing to me.

First, "People talking without speaking." So many conversations are inane. Empty. Trivial. People talk without speaking. Lots of noise—little to say. Convivial social gatherings come to mind. Conversations about kids, sports talk, car talk, glory days, fashion statements, and machismo. Little in the way of substance whereby people connect and care and commune. It is almost as if we really must go to an AA meeting or to a place of worship, if we expect to hear anything of substance or feel safe or vulnerable enough to say anything from the heart.

Second, "People hear without listening." "I hear you, man." But I don't. "I feel you man." But I don't. "I understand." Not really. Words casually written on a jacket, "I don't care—do

you?" expose a culture wherein we do not truly care about the "other." We are so wrapped up in our own stories. I want you to finish speaking so I can tell my own; after all, it is all about "me."

Third, "No one dared disturb the sound of silence." Silence is a space we attempt to fill with noise and blather but it is merely noise and blather. The silence of the noises we make is deafening. No one dares disturb the sounds of silence. We are afraid to hear the truth and speak the truth. Silence reigns. As noisy as we are in a noisy world, the silence of empty spaces fills the room. **"Silence as a cancer grows."** So much noise. So little communication. Silences cross my radar screen: the cell phone user crossing a busy street while engaged in conversation or the couple at dinner, checking messages and texting someone other than the one across the table. What happened to young lovers who look into each other's souls and eyes and hearts? Nothing dare come between them.

Fourth, "And, the people bowed and prayed to the neon god they made." The lyric is reminiscent of the Hebrew people who were distressed over God's apparent absence. They gathered their trinkets, gold, silver, computers, Rolexes, BMW's guns, opioids, and all the stuff they valued. They took them and fashioned gods of their own making, gods who comforted them and soothed them, gods who pleased them, gods who took them to higher highs, gods they could control, gods they could see, and prove, and tangibly touch because they could not tolerate the mystery of an unseen uncontrollable God they could not understand or comprehend, the God who called them out of their narcissistic selves on behalf of caring and loving the "other." That God still calls us.

**Fifth, "And the sign flashed out its warning
In the words that it was forming
And the sign said "The words of the prophets
Are written on the subway walls
And tenement halls
And whispered in the sounds of silence."**

Who dares speak with prophetic voice the word of truth? If we

(continued on back)



look and listen, God still speaks. God is non-stop speech. I heard God speak at least three times this week. I heard God speak in the homeless man who held open the post office door as I entered. With his free hand, he extended a cup. He said, "Help me." I said, "Help me! I need help, too." "You don't need help old man. When you are homeless like I am, then you will need help," the man replied. I stopped complaining about my first world issues and heard the voice of God. The second time, I heard God speak was when I stopped for what I thought was a reckless kid crossing the middle of the street instead of in a cross walk. I honked for him to get out of my way. Of course, he shrugged and glared. He was disrupting my right of way. He represented the voice of God who pleads with me to consider the "other" whoever the other is. The third time I heard God speak was when three little kids (grandkids) invaded my space

and disrupted my "move into a new place" routine. Three little saints. "Let the children come to me—they are the real deal, the stuff from which the kingdom of God is made."

Stop the noise. Listen for the truth. God speaks. Stop. Look. Listen. We make every attempt to do that on behalf of clients who come to Rosecrance for help even as you do that on behalf of people who come to worship and seek to live a life that matters—substance over style—for Christ's sake. 



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Rosecrance offers the best opportunity for lasting recovery. If you know someone who needs help, please call us at 815.391.1000 or 888.928.5278. Our doors are always open to you and your church to learn more about our services. Please call Anne Boccignone, VP of Communications and Development, at 815.387.5636 to inquire.
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Is a news and views letter from Rev. Dr. William Lenters, Rosecrance Griffin Williamson Campus Chaplain. Bread for the Journey is written on behalf of people who live with substance use and mental health disorders. Together, and by God's grace, we will try to make a difference.