

## Silence: A Timely Prescription For An Unprecedented Time

by Ruth Halvorson 4/13/2020

We are living in unprecedented times. Not since the flu pandemic of 1918, when 675,000 American lives were lost and millions globally, have we experienced a challenge of this magnitude. We are being summoned to bring all our collective and personal resources— physical, intellectual, emotional, psychological, and spiritual, to bear in this moment. Severe and necessary measures have been taken nationally, statewide and locally to mitigate the spread of the coronavirus now declared another pandemic. Facing such a life and death reality gives us pause.

In this extraordinary time that places additional worry, stress and strain on everyone, we need encouragement, reassurance, support, and signs of hope. We need to feel we are not alone. We are in need of a strong infusion of hope.

The mission of the ARC Retreat Community and Center is to welcome the stranger, offer hospitality and provide a safe, quiet place apart for renewal, rest and solitude. ARC was conceived in the womb of silence and continues as a place inviting individuals to discover healing and restoration that can be found in silence. Silence brings us back to our center, home to who we are and who we long to be.

Over its 42-year history, thousands of individuals have experienced ARC as a spiritual home, a place of refuge, and a place of solitude to listen to the God within and become mindful of one's inner resources. It's restorative rural setting of woods, streams, and paths calms and nurtures the soul.

Many people are overextended and overtaxed in need of rest and hope. Restoration and empowerment are possible when we periodically stop, take time to listen and be silent, a practice Jesus often used. In Mark's gospel, Mark tells how Jesus responded in situations of great stress and need: "And Jesus said to them (his disciples), "Come away by yourselves to a lonely

place, and rest a while. For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in the boat to a lonely place by themselves.” (Mark 6:30-32).

I recently discovered a quote from Soren Kierkegaard, a Danish theologian and philosopher (1813-1855). He offers a timely prescription for a troubled world. “If I were a physician, and if I were allowed to prescribe just one remedy for all the ills of the modern world, I would prescribe silence. For even if the Word of God were proclaimed in the

modern world, how could one hear it with so much noise? Therefore, create silence.”

The current reality brings us face to face with existential questions: “What really matters? What are our priorities? How do we cope? News reports focus on the growing number of coronavirus infected individuals, lack of medical protective gear and equipment, overburdened hospitals, health care workers and other essential community workers necessary to respond to Covid19. Though we need to be informed, the alarming stories generate fear and heighten the level of anxiety and stress. It is a comfort and a gift to hear wonderful stories of compassion and kindness that bring hope and encouragement in this time of crisis.

We know this pandemic will be a long haul. The spread of the virus will get worse before it gets better. It is less than a month ago since social distancing was inaugurated. Now our governor has proclaimed a state wide “Sheltering in Place” plan. How do we personally manage the challenges of this unpredictable and confining time? It becomes even more important for each of us to find ways to nurture the soul and seek to remain in a spirit of hopefulness.

I live in a senior independent living cooperative with approximately 280 residents in 211 apartments. This week a telephone-calling tree was initiated. I was asked to call a portion of the residents on my floor once a week to inquire how they are doing and if they have any needs. The first call I made was received with pleasant surprise and much gratitude. Being remembered and

personally contacted deepens the bonds of connectedness and belonging, and brings hope.

In these strange and unpredictable times, how we see ourselves and how we see the world and one another can make all the difference. Can this time become an opportunity to recover forgotten truths, reassess what is important and reevaluate how we want to live? Sheltering in Place gives many the gift of more time, time that can be used to deepen selfunderstanding, reestablish connections with one another, develop practices that nurture the soul, and engage in creative, life-giving acts. Might this be a time we regard, (if not now, perhaps later) as an unexpected gift we didn't know we needed? Looking through the current lens of challenge and darkness what signs of hope can we envision?