

Friends

This Sunday is National Save Your Hearing Day. As a professional musician for a significant part of my life, this was a very real fear and an important part of our understanding. Many musicians became deaf, Beethoven was not alone. I don't know if this is still the guidance, but when I was a young woman, the advice was to ensure that a minimum of four hours a day were spent in silence. Not necessarily no speaking at all, but no background music, no listening intently to anything, four hours to rest your ears, in addition to time spent asleep.

As I said, I don't know what the current guidance is, and neither do I want to make light of the way in which deafness can cut people off from the world around them, despite the massive steps that have been taken in developing tools for hearing. However, there is something of significance in that guidance irrespective of our hearing journey. It is in the silence that Elijah finally hears God speak; it is in the silence that Pilate is forced to grapple with his own understanding of who Jesus is; it is in the silence that we ourselves find God.

When Zechariah refuses to believe Gabriel's message that Elizabeth will bear a child, we are told that he was struck dumb, but since his friends had to use hand gestures to ask what name the boy should be given, we have to assume deafness as well. Not a punishment (after all, God has given the law in Leviticus 19:14 "You shall not curse the deaf nor put a stumbling block before the blind"). Instead, since Zechariah has refused to listen, he is no longer allowed to hear, and since if we hear nothing, we have nothing to pass on, there was no need for him to speak either. Now of course, this is not true: there is great wisdom in the thoughts of the deaf and deafened. However, in Zechariah's case, God is making a point, because the wisdom that Zechariah has refused to believe is God's wisdom. Later, when John has been born, Zechariah's hearing and speech are returned to him but with them comes wisdom. We live in a different world, but perhaps still we can find the counsel of the wise, and the counsel of God in some small part of the day given over to silence.

God bless, Vicci