

Genesis 1:1-5

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.

Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

Mark 1:4-11

John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

Sermon: The Waters of Siloe

Some people say you are what you eat. It might be equally true to say you are what you read. My wife and I felt that our local librarian probably knew as much about our home life as anyone else, especially when we went bleary eyed to the front desk and asked in desperate tones - do you have a copy of "Solve Your Child's Sleep Problems" by Richard Ferber.

How about a copy of: Get Out of Your Own Way: Overcoming Self-Defeating Behavior - I don't suppose you'd have that, do you?

Maybe you could actually do a psychological profile of our culture at any given moment based on the best selling books. When I looked on Amazon last week the top selling book was: American Sniper: The Autobiography of the Most Lethal Sniper in U.S. Military History. One review called it: An aggressively written account of frontline combat, with plenty of action." Sounds like it fits the times.

Some books seemed designed and destined to be best-sellers, but other books are total sleepers and their unexpected popularity reveals a public mood that might well have been unspoken and unobserved. One such book was "The Seven Storey Mountain" the 1948 autobiography of Thomas Merton, a Cistercian Monk. The publisher first planned to print 7,500 copies, but within a year 120,000 copies had sold and eventually 600,000 copies were sold in hardcover and three million in paperback. A nation that had just emerged from war seemed thirsty for the story of one man's conversion to Christian faith and his pilgrimage into a life of solitude, prayer, and contemplation.

Merton wrote his book at the Abbey of Our Lady of Gethsemane in rural Kentucky. The monks there were, and are, Cistercians, sometimes called Trappists, an order that emphasizes simplicity, quiet, prayer, and contemplation. Within a year of writing his autobiography Merton also wrote a companion volume, a book which focused not on his own story but on the life of the monks - on the meaning and purposes of their practice. This book he entitled: *The Waters of Siloe*. It has this short preface:

There is intoxication in the waters of contemplation, whose mystery fascinated and delighted the first Cistercians... These are waters which the world does not know, because it prefers the water of bitterness and contradiction. These are the waters of peace, of which Christ said: He that shall drink of the water that I shall give him, shall not thirst for ever. The water that I shall give him shall become in him a fountain of water, spring up into life everlasting.

These are the Waters of Siloe, that flow in silence.

Merton is connecting the scriptural dots here. Jesus says those words about the water that springs up to life everlasting to a Samaritan woman by Jacob's Well, about 35 miles north of Jerusalem.

But the waters of Siloe or Siloam depending on your translation, were a pool inside the Walls of Jerusalem formed by a spring outside the walls that flowed gently through a tunnel built about 7 centuries before Jesus birth. The prophet Isaiah had talked about the waters of that spring as being like the word of God, - the waters of Siloe that flow in silence.

The Gospel of John tells us that on one trip to Jerusalem Jesus met a man born blind and made a paste of mud and put it on the mans eyes and told him: Go wash in the pool of Siloam - and the man did, and his eyes were opened and he could see.

So, if you will pardon the pun, water has a very fluid meaning in the stories of Scripture and in the ritual uses of the Jewish and Christian community.

This morning we read about the baptism of Jesus, and certainly in the sacrament of baptism we employ a broad range of both symbolic meanings and real life experiences of water -

Water that cleans us

Water that refreshes us

Water that surrounds us in our mother's womb

Water that covers the earth and gave birth to life itself

Water that quenches the thirst of every living being.

Every time we celebrate a baptism here the congregation is asked a question:

Do you pledge yourselves to a life together in God's forgiving and healing love, accepting the responsibility to help each other grow in the Christian life? Are you prepared to freely and gladly welcome those receiving the sacrament of baptism into the fellowship of the church of

Jesus Christ, and offer them your support, care and nurture in the love of God and in faithfulness to our Lord?

What is the water we need to grow in the Christian life, what water must we first have in our own lives if we are to offer others our support care and nurture in the love of God and in faithfulness to our Lord?

We need the Waters of Siloe, that flow in silence.

We live in a very noisy environment. Did any of you happen to read a piece that was published near the end of December entitled: The Joy of Quiet? It was in the New York Times but then it was widely circulated on the web.

The author, Pico Iyer, a travel writer, had recently been to Singapore to address a group of advertising people on the topic: Marketing to the Child of Tomorrow. He said the chief executive of the agency that organized the event took him aside. What he was most interested in, the executive began – and Iyer says, “I braced myself for mention of some next-generation stealth campaign” – what he was most interested in was stillness.

Around the same time, Iyer wrote, I noticed that those who part with \$2,285 a night to stay in a cliff-top room at the Post Ranch Inn in Big Sur pay partly for the privilege of not having a TV in their rooms; the future of travel, he wrote, lies in “black-hole resorts,” which charge high prices precisely because you can’t get online in their rooms.

Iyer goes on to note: the average American spends at least eight and a half hours a day in front of a screen, in part because the number of hours American adults spent online doubled between 2005 and 2009 (and the number of hours spent in front of a TV screen, often simultaneously, is also steadily increasing).

And the average American teenager sends or receives 75 text messages a day, though one girl in Sacramento managed to handle an average of 10,000 every 24 hours for a month. Since luxury, as any economist will tell you, is a function of scarcity, the children of tomorrow, Iyer told the marketers in Singapore, will crave nothing more than freedom, if only for a short while, from all the blinking machines, streaming videos and scrolling headlines that leave them feeling empty and too full all at once.

Iyer concluded: Half a century ago, Marshall McLuhan, warned, “When things come at you very fast, naturally you lose touch with yourself.” Thomas Merton struck a chord with millions, by not just noting that “Man was made for the highest activity, which is, in fact, his rest,” but by also acting on it, and stepping out of the rat race and into a Cistercian cloister.

I was struck that after all these years, Merton was once again brought into the discussion – and not a religious discussion, but more a simple observation of what we need to do to keep our sanity.

So while we may not step out of the rat race and into a cloister, the Joy of Quiet is not a luxury, it is a necessity - it is necessary for our sanity and necessary especially for those who take responsibility to help each other grow in the Christian life and to offer one another support, care and nurture in the love of God and in faithfulness to our Lord.

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