

Learning How to Hear . . .

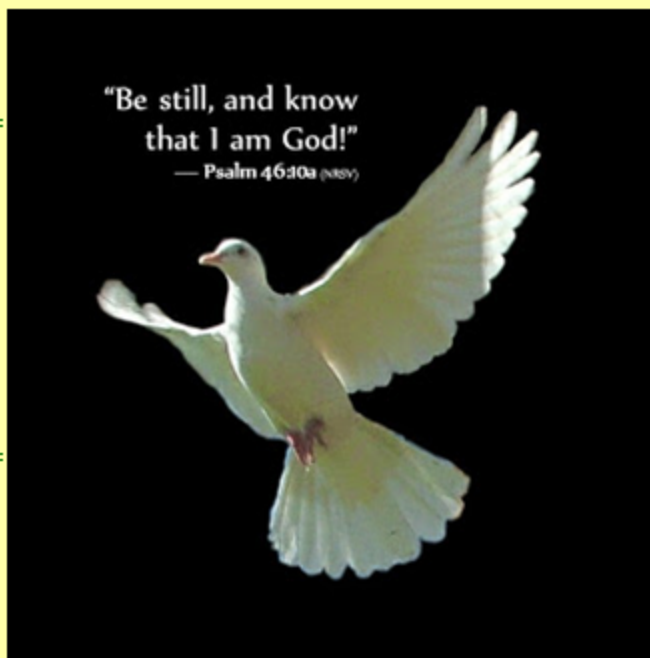
My six-year-old grandson Simon has autism. Though he can speak it's hard for him to focus and identify with other people's feelings and non-verbal cues even though he really wants to be able to do that. He learns how to respond to a person in one situation but human interactions keep changing so it's really difficult for him to predict what to do in any given circumstance. The more time I spend with him the more I realize how hard it must be for him and how courageous he is. There's so much information coming in that it's almost impossible for him to manage. It's overload for him and sometimes the only way he can calm himself and get back on track is by "stimming"-- staring ahead and sometimes flapping his hands. It helps him regain his focus. In the small church he attends the sound of the choir is too much so he wears headphones to block it out and the choir graciously stops singing when it comes to a certain place in the aisle. He's bright; he's loving; but the amount of outside stimulus often overwhelms him.

In some ways many of us are also like Simon--overwhelmed with the constant media and news cycle that has become a routine part of our daily lives. There's so much and it never seems to stop. It's often conflicting, nasty, and can put a pall of hopelessness over us. It tends to make us dig in on our positions, listen only to what agrees with us and block out any person or message that's different from what we believe. Divisions grow deeper and we tend to fear instead of listening with openness and compassion to those who see things differently. What might we learn if we listened? How might both of us be changed? What would our communities and nations look like if we did?

It seems to be an almost impossible challenge and we struggle with how do we find balance, figure out what God calls us to do to work for justice, peace and the common good, learn to see the good in others, begin to love our neighbor as ourselves, and grow in peace and trust in God.

Maybe it might help to put on spiritual earphones to block

out the chatter and spend some time each day just "being" and "present" to God and others in the "right now." I've been trying to do that each day for more than a year and while I can't say I've been successful at "doing" it I believe the desire and showing up has made a difference. My mind may be spinning with to-do lists and "brilliant" solutions to problems even though I keep trying to push these interruptions aside. Though I often feel that I might have "failed" at being present, I'm finding that this is the most important time of my day.



This practice has helped me see that God often shows up in unexpected places—places that shake my perspective and open me to new possibilities. One of my favorite examples is found in this passage from 1 Kings 19 *Then the LORD said: (to Elijah) Go out and stand on the mountain before the LORD; the LORD will pass by. There was a strong and violent wind rending the mountains and crushing rocks before the LORD—but the LORD was not in the wind; after the wind, an earthquake—but the LORD was not in the earthquake; after the earthquake, fire—but the LORD was not in the fire; after the fire, a silent whispering sound.*² It was only then that the Lord told him what to do.

I've always struggled with Psalm 46:10 "Be still and know that I am God." I'm not sure that I know how to be still. I don't think it's in my DNA. Yet my spirit knows that is where I find peace and gain new eyes to see God at work, hear the cries of the poor, and learn to see God in everyone—even those I vehemently disagree with. I think it's only then that we can come together to listen to, respect, and work together for the common good of all—no exceptions.

We live in tumultuous times. Be still and listen for the tiny whispering sound.

—Angela Anno

PLEASE JOIN US FOR 10:30 MASS ON SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 9 FOLLOWED BY A
BLESSING, DEDICATION AND OPEN HOUSE
AT THE FOOD PANTRY.
BISHOP BINZER, AUXILIARY BISHOP OF CINCINNATI, PRESIDING.

OUR CELEBRATION, DEDICATION AND OPEN HOUSE
WILL NOT BE THE SAME WITHOUT YOU.
BRING OTHERS WITH YOU. EVERYONE IS WELCOME.