

Augustana College  
Chapel of Reconciliation

**The Gift of Stillness**

Heather Aldridge

September 15, 2003

Those of you who know me or who have ever taken a class from me will no doubt find a certain irony in the topic of my talk this morning, the importance of being still.

For those who don't know me...I guess you might say I am outgoing and some would say energetic.

In the classroom, it is difficult for me to stand in one place and go through a lecture. I am moving around the front and often gesturing. Even now, I find the lectern a bit confining.

Now with the start of the new school year, even when I *am* sitting, I have a million things running through my head. I am sure you can relate.

We've been in school a whole week and are already facing paper deadlines, exams, projects, joining various groups on campus and/or are going to meetings.

And, while the adrenaline of the new beginning is hanging in, it all seems doable and exciting. Soon, however, that excitement will give way to frustration at our lack of time and energy and our excitement will turn to dread and looking *forward* to finals and a long break.

And it is within this context and backdrop that I come to you today to talk about the importance of stillness.

Over the past several months I have been thinking a lot about stillness. There are a couple of reasons for this extended train of thought. First, my husband and I signed up for an hour of prayer at our church each week. The hour we selected, which seemed like a good idea at the time, is midnight to 1:00am Tuesday night into Wednesday mornings.

At first the hour was an adventure, a challenge. Stay awake and find things to pray about for an hour. As time has passed, I have learned that I must not try and fill the hour with thoughts and words.

I have come to appreciate the stillness of the evening when we arrive and the beauty of the silence in the chapel. Even before going in to pray, the stillness provides peace and calm.

I have attempted to develop a discipline of stillness where I pray but I also spend time trying to quiet my thoughts and my actions so that I may be receptive to the power and will of God.

The second reason for my recent thinking stillness started in March when I discovered that I was pregnant. At first, the idea of stillness was not a conscious thought process. My body simply demanded sleep. Any time I would be still for any period of time, I would fall asleep.

However, after a few months, the sleepiness wore off. Even so, I have found that taking time each day to be still has tremendous benefits for me physically and mentally.

I find I am better able to cope with life's stresses. I am more aware of the beauty of the world around me—including the people in it.

When I am still physically, I work on being still mentally--trying to focus on the quiet and chase out the many thoughts and projects, and "to do" lists that clog my head. It is a challenge to accomplish but worth the effort.

As I was thinking about the many personal benefits I have gained from making an effort to be still, it just so happened that I got a call from Pastor Paul about speaking in chapel. So I decided to see what the Bible had to say about being still and silent.

In looking to the scriptures, I found the promise of many rewards to stillness.

The scriptures of the Old Testament point to the promises God has made for those who take time to be still.

Psalms 37, which we heard this morning promises that the Lord will make your righteousness shine like the dawn and the justice of your cause like the noonday sun."

The only price is to be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him.

In Psalms 19 we are promised that "the heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge."

I would assert that we must be still so that we may hear the glory of God in the world around us.

In the reading from Isaiah the people are told that "in quietness and trust is your strength" but they chose not to trust but to flee.

God's promise is offered again at the end of the passage when we are told: "the Lord longs to be gracious to you; he rises to show you compassion. For the Lord is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for him!"

To return to a familiar passage from Psalms 46, we are instructed to “be still and know that I am God.”

In stillness do we find refuge, rest and strength and, importantly God.

The New Testament also gives us instruction in the person of Jesus on the value of stillness and silence. There are numerous references in both Luke and Mark about Jesus’ habit of going off by himself to pray.

In Luke 5:15 and 16, Luke recounts that “the news about him [Jesus] spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses. But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.”

In Mark 1:35, Mark shares that “very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.”

We know that when he went to the Mount of Olives to pray just before being handed over for death, he withdrew from his disciples to pray.

It is interesting that Luke notes that Jesus OFTEN withdrew, suggesting not just an account but a habit. Christ’s ministry was to bring the good news of salvation to us. He drew large crowds who sought his teaching and healing and Jesus gave of himself according to God’s plan.

However, even the son of God carved out time from his appointed work to seek out solitude and to pray. How much more do we need to make time for silence and prayer.

In this time of beginning, there are numerous opportunities to jump into new activities, new classes, and to meet new friends.

Our joy of beginning soon turns to frustration with how much work we have to do and why we committed to so many projects and people.

That frustration leads to looking forward to the ending of the semester and time off.

I would suggest that a cure for this cycle is to take time to be still.

In order to seek God where God may be found, we must develop a discipline of stillness.

So, be young, have fun but take the time to be still.

May God bless your comings and goings, your activity and especially your stillness.  
Amen.

**MORNING WORSHIP**  
**Monday, September 15, 2003**

**Prelude**

**Welcome**

**Invocation**

Psalm 19: 1-4

**Call to worship**

based on Psalm 37: 5-7

P: Commit your way to the LORD; trust in God.

**C: Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him.**

P: God will do this: God will make your righteousness shine like the dawn; the justice of your cause like the noonday sun.

**C: Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him.**

P: Do not fret when people succeed in their ways; when they carry out wicked schemes.

**C: Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him.**

P: Commit your way to the LORD; trust in God.

**C: Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him.**

**HYMN**

“Spirit, Spirit of Gentleness”

WOV 684 vv. 1-2

**Scripture**

Isaiah 30: 15-18

**Sermon**

“The Gift of Stillness”

Dr. Heather Aldridge

Department of Communications

**HYMN**

“Spirit, Spirit of Gentleness”

WOV 684 vv. 3-4

**Prayers & Benediction**

**Dismissal**

**Postlude**

**HOLY COMMUNION**