



Broad Street Presbyterian Church

760 East Broad Street • Columbus Ohio 43205 • (614) 221-6552 • fax (614) 221-5722 • www.bspsc.org

“A Time to Keep Silence/A Time to Speak”

Luke 9:28-36

March 3, 2019

Reverend Amy Miracle
Broad Street Presbyterian Church
Columbus, OH

Early in the hit musical *Hamilton*, the two central characters meet for the first time.

One, of course, is Alexander Hamilton. He is the orphaned immigrant we see on the \$10 bill who became George Washington’s right-hand man during the American Revolution. His writings helped shape the U.S. Constitution. He served as the nation’s first secretary of the treasury.

The other is Aaron Burr, also an orphan, an ambitious politician who would wind up as Thomas Jefferson’s vice president.

The musical is built around their rivalry across several decades – a rivalry that ends with a tragic duel where Burr kills Hamilton.

When the two men meet for the first time, Hamilton immediately starts to overwhelm Burr with all of his talking. The guy talks a lot.

Hamilton says to Burr:

Sir... I heard your name at Princeton. I was seeking an accelerated course of study when I got sort of out of sorts with a buddy of yours. I may have punched him. It’s a blur, sir. He handles the financials?

Burr responds incredulously:

You punched the bursar?

To which Hamilton replies:

Yes! I wanted to do what you did. Graduate in two, then join the revolution. He looked at me like I was stupid. I’m not stupid.

Hamilton keeps talking. And talking. And talking. Finally, Burr interrupts him and says,

Let me offer you some free advice. Talk less. Smile more. Don’t let them know what you’re against or what you’re for.¹

I wonder if anyone ever offers that advice to Peter. I wonder if anyone ever offers that advice to Peter. If so, he doesn’t take it. Peter talks a lot. Usually without thinking. He does that in today’s story.

¹ Hamilton (Original Broadway Cast Recording), 2016

Speaking of today's story, it's pretty strange. The cast includes Jesus and Peter, James and John but wait Moses is there too and so is Elijah. Jesus' face shines like the sun and his clothes are dazzling white. And there is lots of glory.

It's a moment. Strange. Transcendent. Shiny. Mysterious.

John, James and Peter have a front row seat. James and John have enough sense to know what to do in such a situation. Talk less. Smile more. In the face of what you don't understand, silence is a really good response. An appropriate response. A safe response.

In Ecclesiastes chapter 3 we hear

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:
a time to be born, and a time to die...
a time to weep, and a time to laugh...
a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;

Clearly, the transfiguration qualifies as a time to keep silence. Isn't that obvious?

It isn't obvious to Peter. He takes this shiny, mysterious, once in a lifetime experience and kind of ruins it.

He says, "I know. Let's form a building committee and construct three memorials here to mark the spot, to capture the moment, maybe build a retreat center here on the mountaintop, what do you think, guys?"

Oh, Peter. You blow it, man.

I love what happens next. While Peter is still speaking, a cloud comes and completely covers the three men and it's terrifying and that massive, overwhelming cloud finally shuts up Peter. And a voice from the cloud says, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" In other words,

Talk less. Smile more.

When the voice stops speaking, Jesus is found alone. Finally, not a moment too soon, Peter embraces silence. The text says

And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

I should probably be disappointed in Peter. But, the fact is, that I'm grateful. His obvious discomfort with the situation is my way into the scene. Because I too don't really understand what's going on. I too don't know how to respond to that which is so mysterious. Peter's bumbling words give me time and space to figure it out.

He reminds me of a guy I will call Sam. He was a member of the first church that I served. Big guy. Texan. Loud voice. Confident. And he regularly spoke without thinking. He was almost always the first to speak in any given situation. Didn't matter if it was a class, a session meeting, a Bible study. He would speak without thinking. You might think this was an annoying characteristic. It was not. He got the conversation going. He would say something and then someone else would quickly say, "I disagree with that." You would see this big grin on Sam's face. And then we would be off and running. Sam's presence in a room guaranteed good discussion, honest back and forth. He gave the rest of us an opportunity to gather our thoughts, if only to disagree with him. And he loved it when people disagreed with him. I miss Sam.

But this morning I don't miss Sam as much because we have Peter. It's good to have someone in the room who is willing to speak.

Silence is appropriate and healthy and life giving but it isn't an end to itself. As Ecclesiastes says there is a time to keep silence and a time to speak. Peter helps us prepare for that time to speak. It's important that we are willing to speak

Remember Aaron Burr's words:

Talk less. Smile more. Don't let them know what you're against or what you're for.

Alexander Hamilton doesn't follow that advice. Peter doesn't either. And neither should we. We need to speak of God. We need to account for the hope that is in us, to say something about the mystery. There are too many people out there who will never know about God unless we are willing to speak on God's behalf. It's our responsibility, our privilege, our joy to speak of the One who showers us with love and grace.

And it has always been the job of the church to speak of what we are against and what are for. That work has always been imperfect and flawed and, at times, we get it wrong. But it is still the work we are called to do.

The Roman Catholic Church is doing some of that work right now. Pope Francis ended a landmark Vatican meeting on clerical sexual abuse by calling for "an all-out battle against the abuse of minors." He vowed "to combat this evil that strikes at the very heart of [the church's] mission."² The Pope outlined what the church is against and what the church is for. He is being criticized for not backing up those words with sufficient action but his words are an important step.

On Tuesday, the United Methodist Church voted to affirm and strengthen its opposition to same-sex marriage and gay clergy. It has been a devastating week for so many, including Methodist congregations here in Columbus. I'm talking about churches like King Avenue Methodist and Broad Street Methodist and Bexley United Methodist. The following message can be found on King Avenue's website, written by one of their pastors.

The decision of the legislative session...is deeply disturbing, disappointing, and discouraging. It is tragic and shortsighted that many still do not see how LGBTQ persons bless the mission of Christ's Church...King Avenue will remain a welcoming, reconciling, and serving church which shares God's love with ALL! King Avenue Church will not change what it is and what it stands for.³

Bexley Methodist has a similar message on their website from their Senior Pastor Becky Piatt.

In light of the recent decisions that were made..., we think it's vitally important to remind everyone where Bexley UMC stands. We have been and will continually be a ... warm and loving congregation. We certainly aren't perfect, but we stand firm in our stance that we love, respect, and include EVERYONE in the life of our church. We mean EVERYONE. We are grieving this morning for the harm that has been done to our LGBTQ brothers and sisters...Please know that you are loved and are absolutely welcomed with open arms at BUMC.⁴

² <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/24/world/europe/pope-vatican-sexual-abuse.html>

³ <http://www.kingave.org/about-us/announcements/response-to-umc-general-conference.-february-2019.html>

⁴ <http://www.bexleyumchurch.com/>

These two congregations and many others across the nation are not being silent. They are clearly stating what they are against and what they are for. We stand in solidarity with them. I met with Becky on Thursday morning and reminded her of our support for the congregation she serves. There is a time to keep silence, and a time to speak. This is a time to speak.

Back to Peter. He doesn't stay silent for long. Thanks be to God, he doesn't stay silent for long. He quickly goes back to his speak-before-you-think ways. And, then, after the death and resurrection of Jesus, after Pentecost, as the church is struggling to be born, Peter really finds his voice. He becomes this articulate spokesperson for the saving power of God. With his words, he invites people into a new relationship with God.

I am so grateful for the Peters and Sams of the world. They help us find our voice. Their willingness to risk looking foolish gives the rest of us permission and encouragement to do the same. To speak of God's love when we don't have it all figured out. To imperfectly articulate what we're against and what we are for. And to do so with humility, with courage, with love.

So this morning, I just want to say, "Thank you, Peter."

Amen.