

Let some mortal flesh keep silence

By [Melissa Earley](#)

December 16, 2015

My words feel small. Like I'm trying to beat back the ocean with a stick. I could command the waves to stop, but the sea will keep pounding the sand. Recent world events have generated a lot of fodder for preachers and writers, and yet I have nothing to say.

I watch video streams of Chicago police officer Jason Van Dyke shoot Laquan McDonald 16 times. There are accusations of a cover-up.

Donald Trump says the United States should ban Muslims from entering the country. The ones who are already here should be registered.

Robert Lewis Dear goes on a rampage at a Planned Parenthood clinic in Colorado Springs. Three killed, nine wounded. Syed Rizwan Farook and Tashfeen Malike open fire at a holiday party in San Bernardino, California. Fourteen dead.

I have nothing to say.

It's the season when preachers are supposed to have a lot to say—about the promises of God to bring peace, to feed the hungry, to lift up the lowly and bring down the powerful. I'm supposed to talk about a single candle lighting the darkness, about the fact that "hope is the thing with feathers." To paraphrase *A Chorus Line*, "I dug down deep to the bottom of my soul" and I found nothing—no clever words, no helpful phrases, nothing, zilch.

I am grateful for others who have something to say. I am grateful for those who remind the church of our commitment to inclusion and justice, who show the interconnections between separate events, who cast a vision of a different future.

I am as silent as Zechariah leaving the Temple.

I wonder if my silence is a sign of my shallowness, lack of faith or basic laziness?

Friday I attended a Taizé prayer service at Ascension Catholic Church in Oak Park, IL. I joined with the rest of the congregation in extended silence and singing the simple prayers. The quiet was a welcome relief from the clamor, in my mind and in the news. I sank into the music and let it carry me along. My silence was no longer a reproach.

The text that night was from Isaiah:

A voice cries out:

“In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord,
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

Every valley shall be lifted up,
and every mountain and hill be made low;
the uneven ground shall become level,
and the rough places a plain.

Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed,
and all people shall see it together,
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”

I nod assent. If we are going to hear God speak, maybe it's okay for some of us to be quiet. There are enough words crashing the shore. Is silence God's gift to me and my gift to the world?