



December 2024

Dear friends,

Many churches across the district have made use of the *Hush the Noise* resources produced by the Methodist Church to celebrate Advent and Christmas. The theme draws upon imagery in the famous carol, *It came upon the midnight clear*, which calls us to 'hush the noise' so that we can hear the song of the angels and the 'love-song' that they bring. It's a love song which the writer contrasts with a world weary of war, suffering, strife and the impact of conflict and sin. At least in this respect its themes are thoroughly contemporary.

'Hushing the noise', is, of course, an invitation to listen, to centre ourselves upon God and to open our hearts. It's also, I sense, something that encourages us to wait in hope for the fulfilment of God's promises. It's interesting isn't it that the opening chapters of the Gospel of Luke, which provides the gospel focus for the season this year, is full of people waiting. Zechariah, Elizabeth, Mary and later, Simeon and Anna, are all people waiting for something. Waiting is an attitude of those who live by God's promise and who anticipate its fulfilment. It is the promise which enables them to wait. As Henri Nouwen points out, it is like a seed at work in them that is starting to grow. Indeed, he goes further describing waiting as something that is active rather than passive:

'Those who are waiting are waiting very actively. They know that what they are waiting for is a growing from the ground on which they are standing.'

Faithful waiting is not like waiting for a bus. It is something made possible because it relies on the trust that something has already begun and indeed has already been planted amongst us. Of course, this may require patience and almost certainly a relinquishing of our desire to control the outcomes. Mary's waiting is perhaps the best example of this. As Nouwen points out, she does not attempt to control the angel's message. She believes that she can trust what is going to happen and live hopefully because she has listened carefully to what she has been told.

As you celebrate Christmas and the birth of Jesus, I hope and pray that you will find time to hush the noise, to listen carefully to God and to live hopefully in response to whatever it is that God's Spirit gives you.

Peace and light,

Richard

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