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### *Silence and Wisdom*

Do you ever find it difficult to understand other people and enter sympathetically into their lives? Do you find yourself standing at a distance judging them? The biblical figure of Ezekiel was a person who did not want to prematurely judge. He chose to take another route.

Ezekiel was a preacher and prophet among prisoners. His congregation was composed of exiled captives who had lost their homes, their freedom, and their hope. And now they were living as slaves to the Babylonians in a colony on the banks of a river, where the Psalmist says, "They sat down and wept when they remembered Zion." The light seemed to have gone out for Ezekiel's people, and it felt like the whole world was coming to an end. Ezekiel wanted to help them keep their faith alive, but who would listen to him? Who wants optimism from a long-haired prophet?

So Ezekiel chose to do an interesting thing. We are told that as Ezekiel went out to his people, his first act was to sit among them for seven full days, speechless. Imagine the insights he must have had while waiting, listening and learning among his people in utter silence for seven full days. He lived as they lived, as a captive. He let the blows of humiliation they were feeling fall on his back, too. He put himself in their places, looked at the world through their eyes, until he felt what they felt. And only then did Ezekiel presume to speak to them and offer hope.

We live in a bitterly divided world that seems increasingly contentious and angry. One segment judges and blames another, sometimes attacks and wounds another, yet there is so little effort made to sit together, listening, learning, understanding. Even in our own country the political and religious divisions seem to grow wider and more rancorous. Who is willing to take time to sit humbly, speechless, silent? Who is willing to suspend judgment, rhetoric and resolve until time has been spent to understand fully how others live and think and feel?

Imagine how much more sympathy, compassion and concern might exist in our world, our nation, even our families, if we disciplined ourselves, like Ezekiel, to listen long and deeply before ever we spoke or acted. Silent waiting may not be the only response needed of us in a chaotic and segmented world. But it is a wise first step.