

18. Silence



Everybody should be quiet
near a little stream and listen

One of the glorious spin-offs of the first lockdown especially, was the quiet. Far fewer cars and planes meant that the air was largely free of the hum of transport. The earth heaved a sigh of relief and sank into an unfamiliar stillness. It felt good - sacred, even. Many spoke of a refreshed sense of a world charged with God's presence.

In the 17th century, George Fox, disillusioned with established forms of Christianity, found hope and resolve in the prophet Zechariah: "Be silent, O all flesh, before the Lord" (2.13). All religion's trappings stripped away, Fox urged a simple, silent waiting upon God and ushered the Quaker Movement into being. He would have approved of the page above from *Open House for Butterflies* by children's author Ruth Krauss: "Everybody should be quiet near a little stream and listen". "Children feel what silence means," wrote the influential 20th-century Quaker, Rufus Jones. "There is something in short, living, throbbing times of silence which finds the child's submerged life and stirs it".

But... "Everybody should be quiet near a little stream and listen". The need for silence belongs to all human beings, regardless of age. Part of us risks remaining submerged without it. Simply listening and waiting upon God? Where might we find our 'little stream'?

Today...

...inspire us, O God, to seek some silence,
alert and open to your stirring presence.

Amen