**Malachi 3:1-4**

See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight-- indeed, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts. But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears?

For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap; he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, until they present offerings to the LORD in righteousness. Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years.

**The Song of Zechariah -** *Luke 1: 68-79*

Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel;

he has come to his people and set them free.

He has raised up for us a mighty savior,

born of the house of his servant David.

Through his holy prophets he promised of old,

that he would save us from our enemies,

from the hands of all who hate us.

He promised to show mercy to our fathers

and to remember his holy covenant.

This was the oath he swore to our father Abraham,

to set us free from the hands of our enemies,

Free to worship him without fear,

holy and righteous in his sight

all the days of our life.

You, my child, shall be called the prophet of the Most High,

for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way,

To give people knowledge of salvation

by the forgiveness of their sins.

In the tender compassion of our God

the dawn from on high shall break upon us,

To shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death,

and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit:

as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for ever.  Amen.

**Philippians 1:3-11**

I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ. It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because you hold me in your heart, for all of you share in God's grace with me, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus. And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.

**Luke 3:1-6**

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah,

"The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

'Prepare the way of the Lord,

make his paths straight.

Every valley shall be filled,

and every mountain and hill shall be made low,

and the crooked shall be made straight,

and the rough ways made smooth;

and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.'"

\* \*

This is one of our fears of quiet; if we stop and listen, we will hear this emptiness. If we worry we are not good or whole inside, we will be reluctant to stop and rest, afraid we will find a lurking emptiness, a terrible, aching void with nothing to fill it, as if it will corrode and destroy us like some horrible, insatiable monster. If we are terrified of what we will find in rest, we will refuse to look up from our work, refuse to stop moving. We quickly fill all the blanks on our calendar with tasks, accomplishments, errands, things to be done - anything to fill the time, the empty space.

But this emptiness has nothing at all to do with our value or our words. All life has emptiness at its core; it is the quiet hollow reed through which the wind of God blows and makes the music that is our life. Without that emptiness, we are clogged and unable to give birth to music, love, or kindness. All creation springs from emptiness: *In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void….* - Wayne Muller, *Sabbath*