

4th January 2026

Quiet

**“But my words like silent raindrops fell,
And echoed in wells of silence.”**

Paul Simon, *The Sound of Silence*

In the remarkable Stateroom of Borthwick Castle in Midlothian – the gathering place for guests before and after a wedding or function – there is much to catch the eye. Stylish but not ostentatious, classy but not tacky, the Stateroom is a place of relaxation, in the most beautiful of surroundings. Borthwick Castle has a long history, and the restoration which has brought it to its current state is nothing short of magnificent. But arguably its greatest claim to fame is that it was a stopping place for Mary Queen of Scots and her third husband, James Hepburn, 4th Earl of Bothwell in the fearfulness of a tumultuous period in Scottish history.

Mary, of course, was a Roman Catholic, and the history of the Castle indicates that Mary had a chapel installed in what is now its beautiful Stateroom. It's a tiny place of worship and prayer, set in a window alcove, clearly able to accommodate only one person, and relatively unobtrusive in the Stateroom's size and grandeur. But it obviously mattered to Mary, for daily prayer was integral to her faith and practice of her religion.

As I sat in that little space, with the hubbub of a wedding celebration swirling about in front of me, I was struck by this thought. Don't we all need a quiet space in the corner of our lives for reflection, thoughtfulness and prayer? In the turmoil or beauty of our circumstances; in part of a Castle or family home; in the wonder of nature or a corner of our garden; in opulence or simplicity; in the routines or special occasions of our lives?

Blanche Shoemaker Wagstaff, a 20th century American poet and Associate Editor of *The International* magazine, wrote a piece in her 1921 book *Quiet Waters*, entitled "I have loved quiet", containing these lines:

*I have loved quiet in a leafy glade
Where boughs embrace above a flowering way,
Deep amber pools at sunset where the stray
Soft twilight colours stain the willow shade
And woodlands where sweet silence dwells.*

"A leafy glade" or a small chapel in a grand castle as our "wells of silence"? Where is my quiet space? Where is yours? And are they well used?

A prayer for today

Lord, I yearn for a quiet place, so I can listen more intently to what I need to hear.