

The Still, Small Voice of God (1 Kings 19:1-15)

Pastor Hubert Den Draak, Pinegrove UC, June 23/'13

Elijah was nearing the end of his life journey. His work was about completed. In just a few more chapters of the bible, Elijah would be taken up to heaven in a chariot of fire, having passed the mantle to Elisha.

In today's text, Elijah has just experienced the awe-inspiring victory of the God of Israel defeating the 450 prophets of the false god Baal, making it crystal clear that only Jaweh is God. Only the God of Israel is God.

Of course there's a flipside to everything, and the flipside of having been so fabulously victorious in that showdown on Mount Carmel is that queen Jezebel is now deeply humiliated, and she vows that she'll have Elijah's life.

Elijah escapes to the kingdom of Judah. There he leaves his servant behind, travels one more day, all alone, and flops down under a tree, ready to roll over and die. He feels utterly abandoned by God. What kind of God is this who first makes Elijah the hero of Mount Carmel, only to make him a refugee who has to run for his life. What did he do to deserve *this*?!

But God, in a dream, insists Elijah has a journey to make; it ain't over yet. So he journeys to a cave and rests there - but it *still* ain't over yet. God tells him to go and stand on the mountain, for the Lord is about to pass by... Just what Elijah needed!

There is a rock-splitting wind - but Elijah realized God is not in the wind. There is a tremendous earthquake - but God is not in the earthquake. There is a raging fire - but God is not in the fire, either. Then... everything calms down, the silence after the storm, so to speak. And it's in that silence, in that utter "nothing", that Elijah reconnects with God.

Elijah was afraid for his life and felt all alone, abandoned by God, and understandably so. I'm pretty sure we can relate to that feeling, even though our loves may not be at stake. But as someone once said, if you don't feel close to God, guess who moved? So what this story tells us, is when we are having trouble connecting with God, maybe it's not God who moved away, maybe it's us without ever noticing.

In the midst of our own disappointments and discouragements, we may well feel that we are all alone, having been abandoned by God. In those dark times in our lives, when we can't see the light that's supposed to be at the end of the tunnel and have all but given up, we will often feel that God is not present.

If we should come to our senses and seek God, we will all too often look for God in all the wrong places - and even blame God for not being there. If we should

come to our senses and listen for God, we will all too often miss hearing the voice of God - because we are not *used* to hearing the voice of God. If you think about it, we expect God to sound and behave a certain way - *our* way. All too often our own expectations can block us from hearing and finding God.

The great prophet Eli had experienced that very same thing. You may remember the story: the young boy Samuel was staying with Eli in order to learn the ways of God. Old Eli, however, had not heard God's voice for so long that even when God, in the stillness of the night, called out to Samuel in the next room, Eli did not at first recognize the voice of God. It took God 3 attempts before Eli finally clued in.

We are people who would expect that the awesome God, the God of power and might, would be in the awesome power of a great wind or in an earthquake or in a raging fire. It rarely occurs to us to sit back and listen for God in the silence, in the small, quiet moments, when all we can hear is the beating of our own hearts.

You may know that Jacomyn and I often have Bed & Breakfast guests. Most of them are city people; people so used to the constant city noise, they don't notice it any more. So when they come to our place where things can be absolutely quiet at night, they sometimes cannot sleep because of the silence. Suddenly, they hear the sound of silence. And it wakes them up, because they're not used to it!

You have probably had experiences of that sort, perhaps in the middle of the night when suddenly, there's a power outage. The lights are out, the glowing digits of the bedside alarm clock are dark, no light is coming in through the windows. And it is quiet... There are no electric motors buzzing, no hum of the fridge, nothing in the darkness but... sheer silence. It is at times like those that we may hear sounds we do not usually hear - sounds that are always there, but that are usually drowned out by the noise of all that other stuff.

I wonder if God's voice is like that. It's always there, but too often it is drowned out by our big screen TV's Dolby surround sound, radios everywhere, the blower noise from the gas furnace or the air conditioner, telephones ringing, smart phones buzzing, computers beeping, traffic honking and roaring, and all the rest. Wouldn't it be great if there was a "Silence" button we could hit? Perhaps we should shut down those things once in a while, just unplug our lives and listen for God's still, small voice.



Perhaps we should *re-learn* to listen to the

sound of God's voice so that we can discern it amid all the din of the world. Perhaps we should set aside a quiet moment each day and commune with God. And even when we do take that time, how do we pray? All too often it's us doing all the talking and asking, hardly ever... listening. Ask yourself who is driving the conversation there...

In the midst of all our difficulties and challenges, the monkey wrenches life throws us, when we have all but given up and would just as soon be swallowed up and put out of our misery, we look for God - but all too often in all the wrong places. And we discover, as Elijah did, that God is not there. In a quiet moment that may follow our frenetic search, *that's* when we unexpectedly find God: in the silence or in the void that follows our frenzied search. That's when we'll finally realize that God has been there all the time, talking to us, but drowned out by the noise and busyness in our lives.

"Peace," says God. "Be still, I am with you," says God's little voice; and that is all we really need to know. And in that moment, we can know that things will work out somehow. Not always in the way we ask or imagine, but in the always-surprising ways *God* imagines. Amen.