

Elijah had been busy. Busy and powerful. He had saved himself, the widow and her son from starvation, insisted that the flour and the oil would not run out, and later bringing her son back to life, when she thought the little one was dead.

He had been speaking truth to political leaders like Ahab, who was more corrupt than all the kings before him. King Ahab had married Jezebel who convinced him that the prophets of Baal were more powerful than the God of Israel. She had killed all of God's prophets, except Elijah, but there were 450 prophets of Baal left. But Elijah had the courage and energy to take those prophets on in a sort of Survivor Reality Show called, "Who has the most powerful God?" Each team prayed for God to bring fire to burn the sacrificial bulls, and though it was 450 to 1, Elijah's God was the winner. Elijah made fun of the prophets of Baal when their prayers for the miracle of fire were not working. He mocked them, saying, "Pray louder. Surely your god, Baal will show up." He added water to his site, just to prove that his God was so powerful, God could bring a fire on top of water to burn the sacrifice. As a prophet, it was Elijah's job to eradicate evil. Diplomacy was not common in those days. Those who were against him and his God, Elijah killed.

So as I said, Elijah has been busy doing God's work. He's been busy overcoming evil with good. He's been proving the power of the God of Israel. Elijah's faith is a muscular, confident faith. He does not doubt or question, until suddenly his life is in danger, Jezebel is seeking to do to him what he did to the prophets she supported. He is hiding in a cave, fearing for his life. He's anxious and waiting for God's dramatic rescue, but God shows him something new, and quiet and peaceful. You might say this quiet appearance of God to Elijah foreshadows the coming of Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace. While the stories of Samuel and Elijah are quite different, you will see some similar themes from John's sermon last week and this week's narrative. Both are about listening to God.

<sup>CEB</sup> **1 Kings 19:1** Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, how he had killed all Baal's prophets with the sword. <sup>2</sup> Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah with this message: "May the gods do whatever they want to me if by this time tomorrow I haven't made your life like the life of one of them." <sup>3</sup> Elijah was terrified. He got up and ran for his life. He arrived at Beer-sheba in Judah and left his assistant there. <sup>4</sup> He himself went farther on into the desert a day's journey. He finally sat down under a solitary broom bush. He longed for his own death: "It's more than enough, LORD! Take my life because I'm no better than my ancestors." <sup>5</sup> He lay down and slept under the solitary broom bush. Then suddenly a messenger tapped him and said to him, "Get up! Eat something!" <sup>6</sup> Elijah opened his eyes and saw flatbread baked on glowing coals and a jar of water right by his head. He ate and drank, and then went back to sleep. <sup>7</sup> The LORD's messenger returned a second time and tapped him. "Get up!" the messenger said. "Eat something, because you have a difficult road ahead of you." <sup>8</sup> Elijah got up, ate and drank, and went refreshed by that food for forty days and nights until he arrived at Horeb, God's mountain. <sup>9</sup> There he went into a cave and spent the night. The LORD's word came to him and said, "Why are you here, Elijah?" <sup>10</sup> Elijah replied, "I've been very passionate for the LORD God of heavenly forces because the Israelites have abandoned your covenant. They have torn down your altars, and they have murdered your prophets with the sword. I'm the only one left, and now they want to take my life too!" <sup>11</sup> The LORD said, "Go out and stand at the mountain before the LORD. The LORD is passing by." A very strong wind tore through the mountains and broke apart the stones before the LORD. But the LORD wasn't in the wind. After the wind, there was an earthquake. But the LORD wasn't in the earthquake. <sup>12</sup> After the earthquake, there was a fire. But the LORD wasn't in the fire. After the fire, there was a sound. Thin. Quiet. <sup>13</sup> When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his coat. He went out and stood at the cave's entrance. A voice came to him and said, "Why are you here, Elijah?" <sup>14</sup> He said, "I've been very passionate for the LORD God of heavenly forces because the Israelites have abandoned your covenant. They have torn down your altars, and they have murdered your prophets with the sword. I'm the only one left, and now they want to take my life too." <sup>15</sup> The LORD said to him, "Go back through the desert to Damascus and anoint Hazael as king of Aram. <sup>16</sup> Also anoint Jehu, Nimshi's son, as king of Israel; and anoint

Elisha from Abel-meholah, Shaphat's son, to succeed you as prophet. (1Ki 19:1 CEB)

It was an amazing coincidence, or act of God's providence that my first week in Montreat, the Music and Worship Conference one I shared with Gia, John, and Troy that the four hundred member adult choir was singing Mendelsohn's **Behold, God the Lord Passed By from Elijah**. So I got to reflect on this dramatic text through a week of singing. I invite you to go to Youtube to hear it. Mendelsohn paints a word picture with his music.

No matter how confident, how successful, how faithful one might be, there are moments when we feel anxious, when we are fearfully looking all around us at the dramatic events of life and wondering what God's message is - in all the noise. But God is not in the noise, but in the quiet.

It is interesting how Elijah confidently faced the prophets of Baal, who out-numbered him, but now, after it is over, he is afraid for his life. Sometimes we can rise to the challenges of life, as if on an adrenaline rush of faith, and then afterward, our anxieties crash in and minor challenges send us on a spiral of fear. Twice Elijah is asked by the voice of the Lord: "Why are you here, Elijah?" God presumably knows the answer to the question, but by asking it, God gives Elijah opportunity to express himself. Elijah says, "I've been so passionate about serving you, God, and all the Israelites have abandoned your covenant. They've killed your prophets and they want to kill me too." Elijah is a confident leader, who has asserted his power on behalf of God, and he is now threatened and waiting with great fear. Is he really the only one left who is listening to God? No, we read elsewhere in the scripture that there are 7000 Israelites who have not bowed to Baal.

We spend a good bit of our time in life, waiting with some anxiety. My brother-in-law just got news of fairly aggressive prostate cancer. My sister spoke of trusting God, yet her voice told me that they were feeling a bit anxious. It is very hard to get a diagnosis, then wait for that next test or surgery or lab report. We wait for many things like news from a family member far away. We wait for the right job opportunity. We wait for our house to be sold, so we can move into a retirement community.

We wait for a baby to be born. We wait for that boy or girl to notice us. We wait for all kinds of things. We wait, praying to God, for a sign or an answer, a clear vision.

But this story teaches us that God does not always show up in the dramatic things. God is not in the noise. Zechariah says, “Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord.”

Also we should note because we are Christians reading this Hebrew text that Jesus also showed God comes not by might, but in the form of a helpless infant, who grows up to be a powerful man, who never abused power, but used it carefully for the healing, teaching, or nourishing of others. While we are talking of Jesus, remember that it was Moses and Elijah who appeared on the mountain when Jesus was transfigured, Moses the figure representing the law, and Elijah, the figure representing the prophets. Those two flank the One who brought the law and the prophets together into one grace-filled inclusive covenant. Elijah, like John the Baptist, and all the other prophets are particularly good at hearing God’s voices and then sharing the truth with leaders whose ears are not well-tuned to the whispers from God.

So let’s return to the question I asked the kids: where do you go to hear God’s whispers? You might listen for God’s voice while lying in the bed. You might listen for God’s voice while meditating. You might listen for God’s voice in the morning as you pray and read scripture, a supreme way to hear God speaking. You might listen for God’s whispers in a suffering or oppressed person. Job heard God’s voice in the whirlwind, after much suffering. Moses had to cover his eyes and take off his shoes, for the presence of God is holy. I go to Montreat to cool down, and rest my soul in the providence of God.

C.S. Lewis once said that “God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks to us in our conscience, and shouts to us in our pains; it is God’s megaphone in a deaf world.” Lewis seems to be saying that in our pain, God must be loud to get the message across and that in times of joy, we overlook the whispers of God.

Maybe the time in the spiritual cave on the mountain is necessary for Elijah and for us (wherever our place apart, place of calm might be) to tune our ears once again to hear God, the whisperer, the One who is not

in the noise of the world, but whose voice we desperately need to hear. So let's take a moment of quiet now to listen for the Whisperer of Truth and Grace and Peace.....