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The Sound of Silence
I Kings 19:4-15a

*But Elijah went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a solitary broom tree. **He asked that he might die:** "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my ancestors." ⁵ Then he lay down under the broom tree and fell asleep. Suddenly an angel touched him and said to him, "Get up and eat." ⁶ He looked, and there at his head was a cake baked on hot stones, and a jar of water. He ate and drank, and lay down again. ⁷ The angel of the Lord came a second time, touched him, and said, "Get up and eat, otherwise the journey will be too much for you." ⁸ He got up, and ate and drank; then he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights **to Horeb** the mount of God. ⁹ At that place he came to a **cave**, and spent the night there.*

*Then the word of the Lord came to him, saying, "**What are you doing here, Elijah?**" ¹⁰ He answered, "I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away."*

*¹¹ He said, "Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord, **for the Lord is about to pass by.**" Now there was a great **wind**, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an **earthquake**, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; ¹² and after the earthquake a **fire**, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire **a sound of sheer silence.***

Elijah has just come from an encounter with the prophets of Baal, a false god, and a huge **contest** to prove whose God is real. Both sides built an altar, and when the prophets of Baal prayed to their god to light the fire on their altar, **nothing** happened.

But when **Elijah** prayed to God, fire came down from heaven and lit the altar, and all the water around it, on fire. It was a moment of **triumph** for Elijah...but it didn't last.

When Queen **Jezebel**, a devotee of Baal, heard that Elijah had killed all her prophets after the contest, she took an oath to kill Elijah!

She said to him, 'So may the gods do to me and more also if I do not make your life like the life of one of them, one of my prophets, by this time tomorrow.'"

Then the Bible says in a great **understatement**, "Elijah was **afraid**."
Elijah is in serious trouble when he runs away to Beersheba....
So he sits under the tree, and **gives up** on life itself.

He is afraid, and **depressed**.
And most of us know how he feels, don't we?....
Have you ever felt like that?
I know I have.
Maybe you feel that way **right now**....?

A lot of us have been in that place, ready to give up.
And there are so many reasons we fall into despair or **depression**....

Elijah had lots of reasons to be afraid and depressed....
He is being chased by **evil people**, threatening to kill him,
He is **exhausted** from the big contest on Mt. Carmel,
He is **burned out** as God's prophet,
He is **overwhelmed** by the fact that he is now all alone in the wilderness without anything to eat or drink.

And his situation may sound familiar to us!
Ever felt **surrounded** by enemies?
exhausted?
burned out?
overwhelmed?
If so, you are not alone!

People all throughout the Bible have been there.
The **Israelites** after escaping Egypt felt this way.
While wandering in the wilderness without food,
they tell Moses it would have been better for them
if they had just stayed in Egypt as slaves to die,
instead of **dying of hunger** in the wilderness!

Moses felt this way in Numbers chapter 11,
when he gets so frustrated leading the people
that he asks God if he could just die!

Feeling like this— isn't wrong—it isn't a sign of failure.
It's just *honest*.

And when we come to that honest place...
the Bible reminds us that *God is right beside us*.
In the despair, in the fear...
Especially when we are barely hanging on.

So let's look at this story--what does *God do* for Elijah?
Exactly what God does for *any of us* in the same situation.
God *responds*.
And God *provides*.

You know what God doesn't do?
God *doesn't* tell Elijah—*just stop complaining*,

Instead, God sends *angels* to give Elijah food and drink,
Then urges him to *rest*.
God takes him on a *spiritual 40 day journey* to Mount Horeb
(also known as Mt. Sinai)—
the very same place where Moses received the 10 commandments
and hid in the cleft of a rock, where he personally saw God.

Once Elijah reaches the cave at Mt. Horeb, he hears God asking him,
“*What are you doing here, Elijah?*”

And again, he tells God how *desperate* he is:
“*I have been zealous for you...but now, I alone am left,
and they are seeking my life, to take it away*”.
In other words---look, I've done my job for you as a prophet, and now it's over.

That's when God tells him to go stand on the mountain
and wait for the *Lord to pass by*.

Now just *imagine* what might be going through Elijah's head at this point.
Stand out on this mountain and *God is going to pass by*?
What does that even mean?

What he feels first is a great *wind*—and God is not in it.
Then he feels an *earthquake*—and God is not in that either.
Then he sees a *fire*—and God is not in the fire.

Finally, he hears the *sound of sheer silence*. And that is God.

Some of us know the *King James Version of this*—
God comes in ‘*a still, small voice*’.

The newest English translation, the Common English Bible, puts it this way:
"After the fire, there was a *sound. Thin. Quiet.*" (CEB)

Different translations of this passage are possible
because the *Hebrew* can be translated in more than one way.
The word "*sound*" can mean "*voice*" -- or silence – but however it is translated,
it is something *soft and quiet and still*—
in contrast to the *overwhelming* wind, earthquake, and fire that come before it.

For Elijah, God is not in the great pyrotechnics of nature,
but rather in the *silence*.
The *stillness*.

Now, does this mean God is *only* found in silence?
No, but it does mean that for Elijah at that time, God was in the silence,
So God can be found in silence for us too!

Silence is powerful.

If you think about it, Jesus rose from the grave, and He was resurrected, *in silence*.
No huge fanfare.

Wonderful things can happen with God, in silence!

God certainly appears in large, loud ways—
like a burning bush, a parting sea, tongues of fire.
But God also comes in silence!

I wonder, have you ever found God in *silence, or stillness*?

Psalm 46 is so famous for reminding us to “*Be still, and know that I am God.*”
What does that mean to you?

Let’s try some stillness right now—

I want to have you do *a Breath prayer with Psalm 46.*
Be Still----and Know that I Am God.

What if this story reminds us that ***God is surprising!***
Elijah probably expected God in the wind, or fire or earthquake—

How has God ever come to YOU in an unexpected way?

Have you ever been surprised by God?

I know I have.

Just yesterday a ***great letter came*** in the mail, totally unexpected.

The first time I saw the ***sunrise in Cape Cod***, the display was quiet and beyond my expectations.

My ***daughter called*** me last week—out of the blue, telling me she’s doing well.

It doesn’t have to be fire, earthquakes, or wind to say this is God—

It can be ***silent. Still. Simple.***

And ***that’s God!***

I believe that God loves to show up in surprising and unexpected ways and places!

So, if God shows up,

When things are quiet,

will we STOP long enough to just be quiet with God?

It’s not easy to be still or quiet.

Solitude does not come naturally for most people,
even for introverts who love it.

But it’s ***so powerful.***

I had the opportunity to do it for hours at our family farmhouse in July on our vacation, just sitting on the porch, looking out over the pasture...

In Sarah Young’s devotional, “*Jesus Calling*”, on August 6th it says:

Sit quietly in my presence while I bless you.

Make your mind like a pool of water,

ready to receive whatever thoughts I drop into it.

Rest in my sufficiency, as you consider the challenges this day brings.

Do not wear yourself out by worrying about whether you can cope with the pressures.... Sarah Young, *Jesus Calling*, pg. 228.

What do you think of that?

Isn’t it a blessing to not wear ourselves out with worry?

And how can we make our minds like a ***pool of water***,
ready to receive God’s thoughts?

What would that look like for you?

How can you **just** stop and be still, today?
 No matter how you are doing, how can you do that?
 Because the truth is----God is always **with us**,
 and God really loves to **show up** in the silence.
 The question is, will we make time for that encounter?

How and where do YOU carve out time, for God?
 I know for myself I feel horrible if I don't have my Bible reading, and devotional
 with my cup of coffee in the morning!

How can you stop running from the things that are draining you,
 Things that feel like they are killing you....
When and where can you stop and just be with God?

This story about Elijah is about a man running for his life,
 And **trying to get away** from all that troubles him.
 A guy at the end of his rope,
 who comes face to face with the presence of God.

And the truth is—this isn't just an old story from the Bible.
 God didn't just talk to Elijah then---God talks to us, today!
 And sometimes God is found in the **quiet places**.

Ever seen the movie, **The Horse Whisperer**?
 It has a lot to say about the power of quiet, of calm, of being still and gentle.
 Tom Booker, played by Robert Redford,
 has a special gift of "whispering" to difficult horses.

*A tense, New York magazine editor can't believe her eyes as she witnesses the gradual transformation of her daughter's horse from traumatized to tamed. In one scene, the horse, frightened by the editor's ringing cell phone, gallops off into the far end of a large pasture. So Booker walks into the pasture and sits down, where he waits for what seems to be **hours**. The horse, finally drawn by curiosity and the quiet, inches closer and closer. And finally, comes close enough to touch the "horse whisperer," and allows himself to be led back to the barn.*

What if God does that with **us** when we run away?
 What if, when we are **down and alone**,

God comes up beside us, in the quiet?

What if Jesus is always gently ***nudging*** us with his presence?

Will we ***stop and*** notice?

Will we receive the help and encouragement ***we need*** from God?

Will you?

After God feeds and encourages Elijah,

Elijah is ***sent back to work***, as a prophet---

He is given the ***energy*** he needs to pass the mantle of work to his apprentice Elisha, and to see the defeat of the evil King Ahab and Jezebel.

How is God offering you the ***strength*** you need

For the ***journey*** ahead?

***And how is God offering us the strength we need as a church,
For our journey together?***

Our Elders are reading a book this year, entitled ***Prayer*** by Tim Keller.

And we'll be talking about Prayer and practicing different kinds of prayer every time we meet.

Next month we'll start another

Wednesday Brown Bag Bible Study on a book called

Freeing Jesus, with our friends from Lincroft Presbyterian.

And we'll hear sermons about ***Jesus' parables*** in the Gospel of Matthew each week.

***My prayer is that these things will help feed us,
As individuals, and as a church.***

And that we will take the time to be still, and quiet, and receive God's encouragement and strength for the journeys we face.

Friends, no matter how we feel, or what we've been through,

God is with us—especially in the stillness.

So take time—to receive that gift!

That is the ***Good News*** for Today!

For this gift, all God's people can say, Amen.