

Silence Bites  
1 Kings 19:1-4, 8-15A  
3rd Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 7)  
June 23, 2019

1 Kings 19:1-4 (NRSV) Elijah Flees from Jezebel

19 Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. <sup>2</sup> Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "So may the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life like the life of one of them by this time tomorrow." <sup>3</sup> Then he was afraid; he got up and fled for his life, and came to Beer-sheba, which belongs to Judah; he left his servant there.

<sup>4</sup> But he himself 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."

1 Kings 19:8-15 (NRSV)

<sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> 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?" <sup>10</sup> 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."

Elijah Meets God at Horeb

<sup>11</sup> 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; <sup>12</sup> and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. <sup>13</sup> When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then there came a voice to him that said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" <sup>14</sup> 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." <sup>15</sup> Then the LORD said to him, "Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus; when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael as king over Aram."

Our mid-week study has been discussing the life of the prophet Elijah on Thursdays at lunchtime. We're going to be at it through the beginning of August so there's still time for you to bring your lunch and join us for the discussion.

What I'm finding through this study is that this well-known, seemingly larger-than-life OT prophet of God, is somebody much like me.

Granted, I haven't ever called down fire from heaven BUT the Bible makes it clear that Elijah wasn't much different from US.

Sometimes we forget that even we, seemingly-smaller-than-God-can-use people, can make a difference for God's Kingdom.

Kim shared with me that one of the really neat moments at VBS this last week was sharing with the kiddos that no matter how small they are (and there were some small ones here) or how old they are, they can make a splash for Jesus. When Kim dropped a small ball and a big ball, they hit the water at the same time. BOTH made a ripple.

Those kids didn't know it, but they were learning about some big people words – like "evangelism" and "Spiritual gifts." We can pray that they'll grow up with us here at PPUMC and learn about those topics and more. That'd be a good prayer!

So today, we have BIG persona, Elijah, teaching us little, sometimes-subtle things that make ripples.

The background to today's reading is that Elijah is fresh from a contest with the prophets of Baal to prove whose God is for real. Both sides built a sacrificial altar, and when the prophets of Baal prayed to their god to light the fire on their altar, nothing happened.

Then, Elijah prayed to Almighty God and fire came down from heaven burning the altar and everything on it.

After that, some would say, Elijah got zealous and killed all the prophets of Baal. And this did not make Queen Jezebel happy. She threatened to do to Elijah what he'd done to Baal's prophets.

Then the text says, in one of the greatest understatements in the Bible, "Elijah was afraid."

He was in trouble and he knew it. Jezebel was a powerful woman.

But, you know what Elijah did?

He decided to try prayer.

He's hiding in a cave, fearing for his life, and he called upon God for help.

See how Elijah is like us?  
We've been there, right?  
Scared. Hiding from powerful things.  
What ELSE is there to do but pray?

Gretchen read for us the "what happened next."  
Elijah went out of the cave and stood out on a mountain and waited.

Ever done that?  
Prayed and had to wait for an answer?

You know Elijah was dead serious about listening for a word from God.

But what's the rest of the story?

Well it starts out pretty big, doesn't it?  
There was a great wind so strong split mountains and rocks break into pieces.  
But God wasn't in the wind.  
Then there was an earthquake.  
But God wasn't in the earthquake.  
Then there's FIRE!  
God wasn't in the fire either but I think God was surely reminding Elijah of the big things God can do; that God has done. These things are spectacular!

And then...  
...then there is silence.

It's not in the noise and loud and big...  
...but in the silence that Elijah heard it: God's voice saying to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

Sometimes when I trip or drop something or yell "ouch" I'll hear Gene say, "What are you doing?"

I wonder, with a smile (really) why he doesn't ask, "Are you okay" but when I read this passage and see God ask Elijah "What are you doing" I think, both Gene and God are asking Elijah and me, "Are you in the best place right now?"

Because when Elijah explains *his* situation, God gives a promise not to leave Elijah alone. There IS still work to be done...and God gives the instruction to anoint the next king.

See, Dear Ones, God wasn't in the **sound** bites of earthquakes and wind and fire. God was in the **silence** bites. Some people call it that "still small voice," God speaking to us in the utter silence.

Elijah is an example in God's story about praying. And listening.  
'Cause, perhaps, silence is the VERY thing where we'll hear the voice of God.

It goes without saying that sound bites get our attention.  
Advertisers, politicians, even preachers use sound bites...to get attention.

But, we PAY attention in the silence bites.  
The earthquake, wind, and fire got Elijah's attention and prepared him to **pay** attention in the silence.

The poet, John Ciardi, once said, "*We are what we do with our attention.*"  
Silence is FILLED with the presence of God. Pay attention.

We don't experience devastating earthquakes in Colorado. Praise God, huh?  
But we have watched news reports about California's quakes.  
Or the tsunamis across the Pacific as a result of those quakes.  
So, have you noticed, in the same news report, the people commenting about neighbors helping one another and relief teams coming quickly.  
I think THOSE are the silence bites...of God's still small voice.

The same occurred during the Waldo Canyon fire.  
The uproar was there: "get out" and "evacuation."

We watched the noisy water-dumping helicopters fly over and saw the scramble to get shelters established for all those people who were displaced.

And, then, when we keep it in perspective, there was awesome silence...in less-than-fire-spectacular worship services of thanks about things that really matter: relationships, priorities, and values.

Silence bite. A still, small voice.

In another example, too many of us have experienced the shock and awe NOISE of health scares, of a diagnosis that leads to surgery or long treatments, or both.

Personally, I can tell you about the day I stood on our deck at home just moments before we left for the hospital the day of surgery.

I was scared.

Elijah scared.

And I chose to be like Elijah (I didn't recognize it that way at the time) and I pleaded in prayer.

I know many of you have been there and DONE THAT!

But, I think about that day often.

And as we're studying Elijah, I'm blessed to know that God gave me (gave us) that prophet to show us, in little ways, how big our God is!

The silence came that day.

And I listened.

And I know I heard God's still small voice in the quaking of the aspen leaves. I felt God's army of angels arrive around me.

The silence was broken for me, that day, with quiet peace that God was not going to leave me alone...anymore than God left Elijah alone.

'Cause, we all know, there's work still to be done.

There's a story about a room full of applicants waiting to be interviewed to be a ship's Morse Code operator.

The room is filled with the noise of numerous conversations and the candidates were oblivious to the sound of dots and dashes coming out of the intercom.

Another applicant came in, sat down and waited quietly.

Suddenly, she jumped up, walked into the private office, and after a few minutes, walked out with the job.

"Hey," the other applicants exclaimed, "We were here first! How could you go ahead of us and get the job?"

And the late arrival replied, "Any of you could have gotten the job if you had just been quiet long enough to pay attention to the message on the intercom."

"What message?"

See, the dots and dashes had spelled out: "A ship's operator must always be on the alert. The first person who gets this message and comes directly into my office will get the job."

That coded message was something like a still, small voice in the silence bite.

So, yes, we pray.

We pray here.

We pray at home.

We pray in our cars, anywhere we are, right?

But have we been listening?

We need to step aside more often and listen.

We need the silence, amid the noise of our lives, to listen for God.

And then, think about it, what breaks that silence to move us into the work that still needs to be done?

Could be something as humble as a word of companionship in the silence of loneliness...

...or a word of forgiveness in the silence of hurt...

...or a word of hope in the silence of despair.

Sometimes the silence doesn't even need to be broken by sound.

How much noise does a hug make?

How loud is a compassionate look into someone's eyes?

Those are the moments (and I think Elijah experienced it, as I did standing on the deck) when God does all the talking and we do all the listening.

Let us pray.

Dear God, forgive our noisy ways and teach us to be quiet, listening for your voice that will lead us into purer lives in Your Kingdom's service. Get our attention with earthquake, wind, and fire. And then, O God, let us PAY attention to your still small voice. We pray in the name of Your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.