

2I Kings 19:11-13 (NRSV) ~ Elijah Meets God at Horeb

[Elijah went into a cave and spent the night . . . The Lord] 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; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. 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?”

Finding Your Cave: Listening Spaces

LISTEN! Did you have a chance to read in our Lenten Newsletter, the paragraph that introduced our worship theme for Lent? If you didn't, let me describe it to you, because this actually happened to me this past Wednesday evening. After our Ash Wednesday Service, Birney and I were headed home when, just a block up Delaware Road my car announced to me, “Phone Disconnected!” That means that my phone was not close enough to connect through the car's Bluetooth system. In other words, I did NOT have my phone! As the first shot of panic began to settle-in, I decided to take Birney on home, and then come back to the church to search for my phone. I had not seen my phone since I was in the final stages of preparation for the service, when I had placed the phone on “vibrate.” Since then, I had been in the sanctuary, my office, Judy's office, the library, the restroom, and both entryways. I had been all over the parking lot, since I parked at the far end near Landers Road, and had come around to the Asbury entrance to pick up Birney. It could be anywhere, inside or out. So, the first place I looked was in my office...logical, right? I waited for the choir to come to the end of the piece they were rehearsing, and when all was hushed and quiet, I called my own phone (on vibrate), and listened very carefully for that little buzz. I had to quiet down, and yet listen very intently at the same time.

Well, the good news is, after about 25 minutes of searching and listening, and searching and listening, I found my phone...in my office closet, in my robe pocket!!

As we begin to focus on this season of preparing with repentance for the death and resurrection of Christ, I cannot help but to wonder if **we** are making too much noise, or if we can become quiet enough to listen intently for the voice of God. How can we expect God to speak to us, to lead us, to answer our prayers if our lives are so noisy that we cannot hear God speaking to us?

Elijah was yearning to hear the voice of God. As a prophet, his main focus (job, so-to-speak) was to pass along to people what God wanted Elijah to convey. That message was often **not** a welcome one. It was usually challenging, and almost always involved the people changing their ways. Elijah, like most prophets, was not very popular, due to the content of the messages he conveyed. While Elijah would someday become known as the greatest prophet of the Hebrew people, at the time that this text was taking place, Elijah was literally running for his life from the threat of those who would do him harm. His humanity was in full view, as he experienced fear, depression,

and hunger, and wondered if he should take his own life. But God provided for Elijah's needs—giving him rest, feeding him and directing his path.

That path leads Elijah up on a holy mountain and into a cave. While there, God asked Elijah, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" A rhetorical question, and yet responding gives Elijah the opportunity to clarify who he was as a servant of God, what he has done for God, and now, the threat on Elijah's life. This is where we pick up today's reading as God instructed Elijah to go out to the mouth of the cave to experience God.

Well, you heard what happened, rock-smashing wind, earthquake, and fire, and yet, the all-powerful God was not present in any of those sensational displays. Then there was (depending on the translation of choice) a still, small voice; the sound of sheer silence; And Elijah immediately recognized God in the silence. It was there, in the silence, that God conveyed a new mission for Elijah. Indeed, Elijah's life was still of great value and usefulness for God.

Sometimes we just need to get away from the clamor of the people and situations that would threaten us, in order to hear that "still small voice" of God. What is your "cave" equivalent? What is the place, the situation, the experience in which you are able to focus on hearing God in the stillness? For some, it may be within the "mountaintop experiences" of a retreat, a camp, a time of crisis, a time of solitude. For others, there is a sacred space you may visit more regularly to listen for God in the sheer silence.

What place (a park, a path, a rocking chair, a shoreline) and practice (walking, journaling, reading, making art) helps you become quiet enough, for long enough, so you can hear past the chaos (and the clutter) and to hear God speaking into the depths of your life? If you do not have that place or practice, this Lent is the perfect time to begin again to reconnect your soul with the sheer silence that is God speaking to you.

God understands our humanness: that sometimes we forget things, we neglect to give our best effort, we chicken-out, we mess-up, we run in fear. God knows our human need for rest, food, shelter, and a sense of purpose. And in the midst of all of that, God wants to offer us comfort, encouragement, and a mission!

Remember, the word LISTEN contains the same letters as the word SILENT. And the word SILENT contains the same letters as the word LISTEN.

I have had the privilege of locating several such sacred places and practices in my spiritual journey: walking on the trails at Sky Lake, floating on an inner tube on the St. Lawrence River, hand-quilting all alone in creative therapy, journaling my prayers, creating liturgy which connects life with faith and faith with life.

Where is your place, what is your practice, for quieting your mind enough to listen for God's still, small voice? **Take a just a moment and share with someone seated near you about your sacred place or practice.**

Each week, during this season of Lent, there will be a new prayer station set up near the piano in our Library, where you may quietly listen for the voice of God while

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Rev. Rebekah Sweet

engaging in a spiritual discipline or contemplative experience designed for that week. Please stop by there regularly to be SILENT and LISTEN for the word of God.

O God of our creation and redemption, thank you for understanding us, for caring for every human being, for not expecting us to be super heroes, and for your invitation to LISTEN TO YOU. Help us not to wander in the desert of despair, for you seek to meet our needs and lead us according to your will. We love you, we trust you, and as you have listened to us time and again, may we have the willingness to be SILENT and LISTEN to you. ... Amen.