

## *“God in the Silence”*

Meditation on 1 Kings 19:1-16

June 19, 2016

Merritt Island Presbyterian Church

Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets (of Baal) with the sword. Then the (Queen) 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.’ Then Elijah was afraid; he got up and fled for his life, and came to Beer-sheba, which belongs to Judah; he left his servant there. 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.’ Then he lay down under the broom tree and fell asleep. Suddenly an angel touched him and said to him, ‘Get up and eat.’ 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. 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.’ He got up, and ate and drank; then he went in the strength of that food for forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God. 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?’ 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.’ 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; 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?’ 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.’ 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. Also you shall anoint Jehu son of Nimshi as king over Israel; and you shall anoint Elisha son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah as prophet in your place.

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I had an adventure this week at MIPC! Instead of my normal routine

of office hours, worship planning, meetings, and visits, I taught Bible at our Cave Quest VBS!

We gathered each morning--a dozen or more adult and teen volunteers and 25 to 30 children -- to do some "caving" and learn about Jesus. We sang songs, such as "I Have Decided," "My Hope is in the Lord," and "Jesus is the Light of the World!" The children did crafts. Played games. Enjoyed snacks! They watched video clips and considered how they could apply biblical principles to their lives. We learned how Jesus gives us hope, courage and direction! How we shouldn't worry! How Jesus gives us love. And how He gives us power through His Spirit that lives in our hearts!

It was a busy and sometimes exhausting but also uplifting week for our faithful volunteers. My hope is that we will be stirred to remember, most of all, the "God sightings" we experienced. Julie Hill led us each day to pass a flickering light and share where and when we "saw God"--in the beauty of the world around us and in the love of the people God brought near to us.

The God sightings happened for me in the quiet spaces in between the planned lessons and activities. When I was really *listening* to the children and *fully present*, without my mind traveling to the next thing I needed to do. I saw the Lord when a little boy shared about starting kindergarten in the fall and already missing his friends from VPK. Others shared their sadness at the loss of family members and beloved pets. I saw God in the funny cat stories that created a sense of community and intimacy before the so-called "real" lessons began. I saw the Lord when the children responded in unexpected ways to my

carefully planned lessons. Once, I pulled a number of objects out of my big, black bag, one by one, to illustrate some of Jesus' teachings on the Sermon on the Mount. After I pulled out a flashlight, salt shaker, plastic lily bouquet, and a book of Florida birds, a little girl jumped up, stuck her head in my bag, and said with wonder in her voice, "How much STUFF do you have in there?!" Then, when I was teaching on Jesus telling us to be "Salt for the World" a child blurted out, "Salt is BAD for you!"

I saw Jesus in the way the children grasped the concept of letting our light shine for the world as letting our kindness, good deeds and gentleness show as a witness to Christ's love. They came up with all sorts of good things they already do, like visiting friends and family in the hospital, helping with chores, and making pictures and cards to give away.

Truly, God was with us all week. God never leaves us! But what a blessing it is when we experience those unexpected God sightings-- when suddenly we can *feel* God's comforting presence and are reassured that God is using all of us--despite our weaknesses, weariness and insecurities-- for His special work!

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Our reading in 1 Kings today tells of Elijah, a man God is using for His purposes, despite the prophet's insecurities and weariness. Elijah is a "wanted man," an "enemy of the state," fleeing wicked Queen Jezebel who has threatened his life, traveling many miles to a wilderness area, to Beersheba. Elijah, obeying God, has killed the prophets of Baal, whom

Jezebel worships. Beersheba is the southernmost area of the territories that the Israelites settled, belonging to the tribe of Judah. Beersheba is founded, Genesis tells us, when Abraham and Abimelech fight over a well and make a covenant. Abimelech's men took the well from Abraham after Abraham dug it, so Abraham brings sheep and cattle to Abimelech to try to get the well back. He sets aside seven lambs to swear that it was he who had dug the well. Abimelech concedes that yes, the well belongs to Abraham. Beersheba is Hebrew for "Well of Seven" or "Well of the Oath."

Elijah is miserable at Beersheba; he is rebelling from God; the Lord has not led him there, but God will still provide protection and sustenance. Underneath a broom tree, a weary, frightened Elijah tells God that he's done! "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life." Then he falls asleep. But instead of dying of hunger or thirst--or being killed by Jezebel's armies--Elijah is cared for by an angel of the Lord, who gently wakes and nourishes him with water and bread that has been baked on hot stones for him! Elijah eats, drinks, and goes back to sleep. Then it happens again--the angel awakens Elijah and feeds him, this time telling him that he must eat to have strength for the journey ahead. Wait a minute! Didn't Elijah tell the Lord that he is done? Seems God has other plans! Makes me think about the many times God leads us to do things that are hard for us--that are really tiring for us and stretch us in so many ways--but that doesn't mean that God doesn't want us to do them! It only means that we need God's help with the work he has called us to! The food Elijah eats miraculously feeds him for 40 days and 40 nights--does that remind you of something? Yes! Noah's ark!

All this time, the Lord has not responded to Elijah's rant or rebellion. Finally, in verse 9, the word of the Lord comes to the prophet. "What are you doing here, Elijah?" God asks--confirming that Elijah's trip was not what God had wanted him to do. Elijah is defensive, assuring the Lord how zealous he has been, then expressing his fear. "I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away." He is conflicted. He doesn't really want to die--as he had requested of the Lord under the broom tree; he just doesn't want to do the hard things that he knows God wants him to do.

In verse 11, Elijah is warned of an imminent personal encounter with the Lord--not just a prophetic word. The Lord is about to "pass by." But God will not come as Elijah expects--not in the great wind or the earthquake. Not in the fire. This unpredictable God, from whom we can never hide, is in the "sound of sheer silence." Elijah, a sinful man in the presence of a holy and righteous God, must cover his face with his mantle--the one that he will soon throw over Elisha, his successor, as he plows a yoke of oxen in his father's fields.

God asks Elijah, a second time, "What are you doing here?" Elijah's answer is the same as it was before. "I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away." This time, Elijah's heart must be ready to hear from God, because the Lord tells him to go back--and finish the work He has called him to. Elijah has 2 kings to anoint and a prophet to train up to take his place, among many other things, before a chariot of fire and a whirlwind take him up into the sky. This time, Elijah will trust the Lord--not heard in the wind, earthquake or fire, but in the silence--and obey, knowing that God will give him the power and courage to do

what the Lord has planned for him to do. Despite his insecurities. Despite his fears. Despite his weariness.

Do you? Do you, like Elijah, trust the Lord to strengthen and lead you to do what God has planned for you? Listen for God, not just when you are alone, but throughout the day--especially in between all those careful plans that you have made. Listen for the Lord and be present with the people God has brought near to you! Listen for the Lord in the noise and chaos of your life. But especially in the silence. Seek, with the Spirit's help, to obey.

Let us pray.

Holy One, God in the silence, forgive us for our rebellion--for when we have run from you, with excuses--too weary and frightened by what you call us to do. Give us courage to trust in you. Thank you for your faithfulness to provide all that we need, every day, to minister to one another and to our community--to witness of your unconditional love, mercy and grace, shown in the gift of your precious Son, our Redeemer. Thank you for the help we received from Cocoa Presbyterian Church this week and for drawing the children, teens and adults who came to participate in VBS closer to one another--and to you. Bless our community with many more God sightings in the weeks, months and years to come. Help us to slow down and be fully present with the people you have brought near us. Open our hearts to seek your face and listen for your voice. Strengthen us by your Spirit to obey. In Christ we pray. Amen.