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Friday, June 17, 2022
Year C, Proper 7

1 Kings 19:1-4, 8-15a
Luke 8:26-39

“There’s power in silence”

- Do you use a kettle to make your iced tea?
 - In our kitchen, we have a little tea kettle in which we put one tea bag and fill it with water
 - Turn on the stove and wait for the whistle
 - But our tea kettle is a little temperamental
 - If you fill it too full, or turn the heat on too high, it will spew hot tea all over the stove.
 - And sometimes it will still do it, even if you do everything just right.
 - There’s a trick to preventing the mess on the stove
 - You have to catch it just right, right before it whistles and spews
 - Now as the water boils, it gets louder. You can hear it bubbling in the kettle.
 - And right as the pressure builds and it gets ready to whistle, something changes.
 - The kettle grows quiet. It lasts about two seconds before a combination of the whistle and hot tea shoots out of the spout
 - It’s in that little moment that you have time to yank it from the burner and save yourself the cleanup
 - That’s how I imagine the silence in our Gospel today with Jesus and the demoniac and with God’s interaction with Elijah
 - A silence full of potential energy caught between the boiling water and the whistle and mess to come
 - A silence that allows each of these men to change their course and direction
 - A silence that we all need in our lives from time to time
 - There’s power in silence.
- First, in our Gospel, Jesus meets a man possessed by many demons
 - Now I’ll admit to you that instantly, my own skepticism arises—possessed by demons?

- That is very foreign to my own experiences and to my modern world view.
- I have never experienced or witnessed a demon possession that was not explained by some other illness, except in the occasional scary movie
- Some of the oldest references to demon possessions were called “sickness demons” who supposedly caused of all diseases, according to the ancient Sumerians^{1 2}
- Perhaps that view on demons is a little more helpful- maybe this man had several things wrong with him that prevented him from leading a normal life
- An incurable disease, seizures, mental illness, addictions- all can seem to take on a life of their own when you are struggling against them
- They can seem like an evil, conscious entity, beyond your control, with a mind of its own... can't they?
- Regardless of what ailed this man, the point of the story is that Jesus was able to overcome it
- And it is no small matter that Jesus can command demons in a Gentile land³
 - Jesus' power is not limited to Jews, but extends to Gentiles as well
 - To people who do not worship Yahweh
 - This healing makes a pretty big statement about God
- Before, the man could not sit still or lead a productive life, but after his encounter with Jesus, would sit still and listen.
- Jesus cured the man, and gave him peace of mind.
- **Jesus brought the silence to a Gentile man who had nothing but noise**
- When the people from the town arrived, he was sitting at Jesus' feet listening and “clothed in his right mind,” waiting for instructions, wanting to follow Christ
- And in that still moment was when he was able to hear Jesus' instructions to return home and declare how much God had done for him

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demonic_possession

² <http://theunexplainedmysteries.com/demonic-possession.html>

³ David Lose, http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?lect_date=6/20/2010

- There is power in stillness and quiet, isn't there?
 - A point that is made even clearer to us in the Elijah story
 - For it is here that God shows up in the silence
 - Elijah is definitely an interesting character in our reading for today
 - What makes this so unusual is that immediately before today's 1 Kings reading, Elijah was on the mountain top, figuratively and literally
 - He had just come from winning a prophet showdown with the worshippers of Baal
 - The story goes that Elijah challenged 400 prophets of Baal to a competition, and Baal was unresponsive.
 - Elijah even taunted the prophets saying that perhaps Baal could not hear them because he was distracted, busy, or asleep.
 - Yet Yahweh prevailed by sending fire from heaven and consuming the offering on the altar- and the altar itself, for that fact
 - After killing all of Baal's prophets and achieving a great victory for God, Elijah is on the run from Jezebel who has vowed to have him killed
 - Does that strike you as odd?
 - That after such a great demonstration of God's power over the false god's prophets, Elijah is running scared.
 - Could not God also protect him from Jezebel?
 - Sure, but Jezebel had him scared and he was worried that this was the end
 - Elijah runs about as far south as you can while still staying in the country⁴, and it is there God finds him...
 - Scared and ready to die
- I don't think Elijah's situation is too weird after all
 - Who hasn't had a mountain top experience to only very quickly thereafter be plunged into the valley of despair?
 - Sometimes life feels like a really extreme roller coaster
 - Maybe Elijah got caught up in it all, got a little ahead of himself
 - Maybe he felt a little out on a limb, especially with Jezebel vowing to kill him that day.
 - Jezebel's power was tangible and real to Elijah, even after such a large victory with God⁵

⁴ <http://www.ucc.org/worship/samuel/june-24-2007-twelfth.html>

⁵ Nancy deClaissie-Walford, http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?lect_date=6/20/2010

- Elijah wanted turn the tide of false worship, but ended up running for his life instead⁶
- Elijah claims he is “no better than his ancestors”- that is, already dead.
- Elijah was overwhelmed by the evil around him, much like our demoniac in the Gospel
 - God calls to Elijah after he had run away and asks him, “What are you doing here, Elijah?”
 - Elijah responds that he wanted to overthrow the altars of the false idols, but now he is all alone.
 - Elijah does a lot of talking, but does not listen
 - Then God shows him several things:
 - a great wind that breaks rocks and splits mountains
 - An earthquake
 - A fire
 - But God was not in any of them
 - Then sheer silence- that’s where God is
 - God comes in silence, not in a powerful, loud expected fashion
 - And God asks again, “What are you doing here, Elijah?”
- It’s only after God shows Elijah the silence and the calm that Elijah is actually able to hear what God is saying
 - Just like the demoniac from the Gospel, at first Elijah is too caught up in his circumstances
 - When God asks him the first time, he can only see his own predicament
 - But the second time, he is able to calm his own anxiety and fear and see God’s help in the silence
 - He is able to find God’s strength and empowerment not in the miraculous, but from God’s empowering from within. ⁷
 - Elijah is then sent by God to anoint kings and prophets
- How often is it life seems to get away from us
 - That we feel we are alone and out on a limb and that God is nowhere in sight.
 - God calls to us, but we are ready with our litany of reasons why things are not good, why we can’t
 - We can hear God asking, “Why are you here?”

⁶ <http://www.ucc.org/worship/samuel/june-24-2007-twelfth.html>

⁷ <http://www.processandfaith.org/lectionary/YearC/2009-2010/2010-06-20.shtml>

- In the silence is where we can hear God calling to us, and leading us.
- When was the last time you sat quietly, light a candle, and prayed?
- Not because you wanted something, or needed something from God, but because you wanted to be in God's presence
- To Listen, to experience the divine as it runs through your being
- Just to be in God's presence?
- The summer can be a busy time- if you are like me and my family, summer schedules are often hectic with the kids' camps and daycare,
 - And with travel possibilities after staying close to home for a couple of years
- Or maybe the summer is the time when you unplug a little and rest, get in some rounds of golf or some hiking
- Maybe the unrest, the violence, the shooting, the war, and the tragedy of our world keeps you on high alert- keeps your mind running loudly
 - My heart goes out to the continued shootings, and especially St. Stephens Episcopal in Alabama this week
 - It can feel like it's spinning out of control
- It is in these situations- all situations- that we need to find some time to quiet the voices in your own head
- An intentional effort to "hear nothing," and to be in the quiet
- And listen to the one that comes in the silence, the one that stirs in the deep
- God speaks there, in a place of silence beyond our own loud ego, emotions, and opinions
- Like both of our readings this morning, it is after we have quieted ourselves that God empowers us and sends us on our way
- There's power in silence

Amen.