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Mark 6: 30-44 & 1 Kings 19: 1-16

Deeper in Faith: Where is God? Stillness, Solitude, Silence & Service

I want to set the stage a bit for our second scripture this morning. The context of the story plays into how we understand its message related to our series Deeper in Faith.

Our story takes place in roughly the mid 800's BCE. Kings David and Solomon are long dead and the kingdom they ruled split about 75 years prior. Our story is set in the northern kingdom of Israel during the reign of its seventh king – King Ahab. For a number of years, the Northern Kingdom had been moving away from a centralized religion worshipping the Lord God in the great Temple Solomon built. They had drifted into constructing local altars and temples dedicated to the Canaanite deity Baal. This was both a religious and political crisis. This crisis was intensified when Ahab's father Omri arranged a marriage between Ahab and Jezebel, daughter of the King of Sidon. Ahab built a temple for Baal, and his wife Jezebel brought a large entourage of priests and prophets of Baal and Asherah into the country.

In this context Elijah is introduced in 1 Kings 17 and he warns Ahab that there will be years of catastrophic drought so severe that not even dew will form, because Ahab and his queen stand at the end of a line of kings of Israel who are said to have "done evil in the sight of the Lord." There are a number of encounters between Elijah and King Ahab and his wife Jezebel that put Elijah's life in danger. These culminate with a direct test of powers between Elijah's God (the Lord God or Yahweh) and Jezebel's god Baal. In a dramatic contest, Elijah, through the work of the Lord, defeats the Canaanite god Baal and seizes the prophets and priests of Baal. It then begins to rain, signaling the end of the drought. The battle is epic and King Ahab and Queen Jezebel are none too pleased by this and threaten Elijah... Listen now as we hear the next chapter of Elijah's story 1 Kings 19. Please note that our scripture this morning is long, so I am going to read a portion of it and reflect on it, and then read the remaining.

Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. 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." 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.

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, or the journey will be too much for you." 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. At that place Elijah came to a cave and spent the night there. **The word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.**

The 9th and 8th centuries BCE were turbulent times in the history of the Hebrew people, with frequent changes in rulers. And threats galore from neighboring empires. Some of these threats were successful, including one from Assyrian king Sargon II who deported a good chunk of the Israelites in the Northern Kingdom to Assyria. About 150 years later, Babylon conquered the Southern Kingdom of Judah, leading to the great exile of the Hebrew people.

In this unsettled and tempestuous period, prophets had a unique role. When we hear the term prophet, we sometimes think about fortune tellers or someone who could predict the future. However, the role of a Biblical prophet was to be the voice of God to the people, ordinary people and often people in power. The prophets voices emphasized justice and faithfulness to God's covenant, while the political leaders promoted loyalty to the throne, often through fear and intimidation. Prophets like Elijah were forever reminding the people that they were losing their souls for seemingly quick fixes to intractable problems, losing their souls to rulers wanting bigger and more opulent palaces; losing their soul by commodifying their resources rather than sharing them.

To say that this was difficult and stressful work is an understatement. When we encounter Elijah this morning he is spent. He has given his all to defeating the gods of the Queen Jezebel and he is on the run, trying to preserve his life. Adrenaline should be coursing through his veins. And yet, and yet Elijah was spent. He was so spent that as he was fleeing for his life, he stopped under a solitary broom tree and contemplated his future existence. Elijah was so spent that as he was fleeing for his life, he fell asleep under a tree. He was so spent that an angel had to prompt him to eat, not just once but twice. And after he had slept, ate, and drank, he was strengthened enough to journey for 40 days and 40 nights to mount Horeb, the mount of God. At that place he came to a cave and spent the night there.

The Rev. Cameron Trimble describes Elijah's situation this way: "Elijah ... does not sound triumphant. He sounds like someone whose body and spirit can no longer carry the weight of the world." And then she offers a parallel to our world today. She says,

"I think many people know that feeling right now. There is a particular exhaustion that comes from living too long inside sustained crisis. War after war. Democratic erosion. Ecological collapse. Corruption so blatant it barely even hides anymore. Every day asks for moral attention. Every day demands emotional energy. Every day seems to bring another reason to be alarmed. After a while, the body keeps score." ¹

¹ Cameron Trimble. Under the Broom Tree, *Piloting Faith*. May 7, 2026 <https://www.pilotingfaith.org/p/under-the-broom-tree>

Elijah's body kept score. The disciples' bodies kept score. Jesus had sent the twelve disciples out two by two into the villages to do ministries of healing and teaching. He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff: no bread, no bag, no money in their belts. Scripture tells us that the disciples went out and proclaimed that all should repent. They cast out many demons and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them. Jesus recognized that this work had depleted the disciples. We heard Kent read from the Gospel of Mark chapter 6: "The apostles gathered around Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. Jesus said to them, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they, that is Jesus and the disciples, went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves."

Elijah's body kept score. The disciples bodies kept score. And Jesus' body kept score. He was reeling from the death of John the Baptist, needed to regroup, recharge and restore himself. And following this rest and refreshment, Jesus and the disciples fed more than 5000 with fives loaves and two fish. And what about Elijah....let's hear what happens next for Elijah after he sleeps and has been fed, hearing from 1 Kings 19: 9 - 16:

Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah, 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. **The word of God for the people of God.**
Thanks be to God.

The Lord God gave Elijah instructions to do three important tasks – to anoint a new King of Aram, to anoint a new King of Israel and to anoint a prophet to succeed him. Pretty heady stuff. And how did Elijah know whom he was anoint? The Lord spoke to him.

Now Elijah, like many of I suspect, expected to hear God in some dramatic fashion – in a great strong wind or in the rumbling of an earthquake or in a blazing fire. These are images we often associate with God's messaging us through the Holy Spirit, like what we see on Pentecost. Sometimes the voice of the Holy Spirit is so loud and obvious that we can't help but notice.

And sometimes it is not. Sometimes God's breathes the Holy Spirit into the stillness. After the winds, after the earthquake, after the fire, no messages from God. And then the sound of sheer silence. And friends, that is when God speaks to Elijah. In the silence.

Like us, Elijah is living in a world full of noise and chaos. The natural world was not cooperating - there was a terrible drought leading to famine; the rulers on the nation were focused on themselves not the good of those they led; and rather than following the Lord who rescued them from slavery and led them to Canaan to form their own nation – the people are worshipping a myriad of gods. How can Elijah hear God in the midst of all of this chaos? He expects to hear God's voice in the wind and the earthquake and the fire, but instead it is in the silence.

God shows up in the silence, the solitude and the stillness and the deserted places, as we hear both in the Gospel passage from Mark and Elijah's story from 1 Kings. The silence and the stillness and solitude help prepare the Elijah, the disciples, and Jesus for the work that lay ahead, their service to God and community. In two weeks, we will talk about the importance of silence and solitude and stillness and Sabbath as important and necessary in their own right – and they are. But this morning, our scriptures point to their value is helping us listen for where God is calling us to serve and helping us to prepare for that service.

God recognizes that more than anything Elijah needed sleep and food. Jesus recognized that the disciples needed to get away and rest. The Lord God and Jesus don't lecture them on needing to do more or having a deeper faith or participating in one more event. In her meditation on this passage, the Rev. Cameron Trimble reflects that these details on the value of rest are important, "because we are living in a culture that romanticizes endurance while silently destroying people. We praise overwork. We celebrate constant availability. We expect human beings to absorb a relentless stream of grief and fear and somehow remain psychologically stable. Before Elijah hears God's voice, he sleeps. Before he finds clarity, he eats. Before wisdom arrives, he rests. That is not incidental to the story. It is the story. ... The wisdom of Elijah's story is not withdrawal from the world. He eventually returns to the work

before him. But he does not return immediately. First he rests. First he eats. First he remembers he is a creature, not a machine.”²

Our scriptures remind me that, we too, live in a world with so much noise. I believe the Holy Spirit is God still speaking in the world today, meeting us in the messy world in which we live. The work of the Holy Spirit is not easy work. It is the Holy Spirit who breathes into us as we seek God in prayer and scripture. It is the work of the Spirit who reconciles us to my siblings, so words of disagreement are transformed into sharing the bread and cup. It is the work of the Spirit who moves us from complacency and apathy and worrying what others think to do the hard and messy work of promoting justice for all, of being a voice and love in a world where hate speaks too loudly, a voice of grace in a world where retribution seems oh so much easier. Our challenge is to recognize the still small voice of the Spirit amidst the noise and busyness of life. This is why we celebrate a Sabbath July month at PCO, where we take a break from our regularly scheduled meetings and activities, so we too can experience silence and solitude and stillness and may be a new way of serving others. Our ritual actions this week will give us an opportunity – or maybe even permission – to take time to nourish ourselves and listen for God speaking. May it be so. Join me in prayer.

² Cameron Trimble. Under the Broom Tree, *Piloting Faith*. May 7, 2026 <https://www.pilotingfaith.org/p/under-the-broom-tree>