

9/4/22 Message: Finding Your Cave: Listening Spaces by Pastor Jenn

Scripture Lesson: 1 Kings 19: 11-12

[Elijah] went into a cave and spent the night... The Lord said, “Go out and stand at the mountain before the Lord. The Lord is passing by.” A very strong wind tore through the mountains and broke apart the stones before the Lord. But the Lord wasn’t in the wind. After the wind, there was an earthquake. But the Lord wasn’t in the earthquake. After the earthquake, there was a fire. But the Lord wasn’t in the fire. After the fire, there was a sound. Thin. Quiet.

Message: Finding Your Cave: Listening Spaces

We had some pretty loud thunderstorms this past week in our area and every time I hear the thunder I think of the saying I heard as a child that a thunderstorm meant God was bowling. Did you ever hear that one? And lightening meant God got a strike. Funny part is I tried to tell my kids that when they were younger, like in early elementary school, but they didn’t have any of that, in fact one proceeded to correct me telling me that thunder was caused by the “rapid expansion of the air surrounding the path of lightning” So much for my playful wisdom, eh?

As we start this new sermon series, *Listen*, we are being invited to open ourselves to learning the various forms that God communicates with us. And as we do, we may, like Elijah, learn some new ways.

Here’s the background. Elijah was a Hebrew prophet whose name means “my God is the Lord” He came from Tishbeh in Gilead, believed to be Northeast of Jerusalem. We first meet Elijah in 1 Kings when God calls upon him to challenge the evil king Ahab of the northern kingdom of Israel in the 9th century BCE. During Elijah’s time the king was not worshipping nor honoring God, in fact he worshiped the pagan god, Baal. And so he had prophets of this false god advising him. God invites Elijah to challenge these false gods, and in chapter 18 of 1 Kings we read how the prophets of Baal call upon their god to rain fire from heaven, but nothing occurred. At this point Elijah builds an altar of stones, digs a ditch around it, puts a sacrifice on the top of wood and requests water to be poured over his sacrifice three times. Elijah calls upon God, and God sends fire down from heaven, burns the sacrifice, the wood, and the stones and dries up the water in the ditch. So God was celebrated by the people and Elijah. However, Ahab’s wife, Jezebel, was not happy with Elijah and vowed to kill Elijah.

Elijah flees to the wilderness, and at the beginning of chapter 19 we read, how Elijah “traveled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God. ⁹ There he went into a cave and spent the night.” Now, if you recall, Mount Horeb is also known as Mount Sinai, where the Ten Commandments were given to Moses. And while the English translation writes Elijah went to “a” cave, the Hebrew text writes “the” cave. “The” cave at Mount Horeb would be the cave that Moses was summoned to by God. Elijah went to the place he hoped to see God, just as Moses did. Verse 9 we read “And the word of the Lord came to him: “What are you doing here, Elijah?” to which Elijah shared his struggle, his fear for his life, his yearning for help.

¹¹ The Lord said, “Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.” God hears Elijah’s prayer, but doesn’t answer it in the way Elijah expects. The text reads A very strong wind tore through the mountains and broke apart the stones before the Lord. After the wind, there was an earthquake. We expect God the almighty to be in an earthquake if God was coming to see us, don’t we? All of creation would shake, hear comes the God whose bowling produces thunder and lightening, right? But the Lord wasn’t in the earthquake.

After the earthquake, there was a fire. Refiner’s fire, right? Heating out the impurities. But the Lord wasn’t in the fire.

After the fire, there was a sound. Or as another translation writes, “a gentle whisper” This is when Elijah goes out toward God. He heard God in the sound, the quiet, gentle whisper” even though it was not exactly what he expected, being the God who destroyed the sacrifice he made, being the God who moves all of creation, and yet, this God is also tender, and can be so present and so near, you have to stop in the silence to hear God’s whisper. It’s not easy to hear someone’s whisper, is it? You have to lean in, to listen.

Friends as we begin this sermon series, we start out learning that God wants to help us, especially in those times we seek God out. And through the story of Elijah we recognize God can and will be there, in such a close manner that we need to lean in, and listen, to hear what God offers us to help us. Because God will help. For Elijah, God will help through a friend, a colleague, Elisha, who will be his co-worker in ministry. For you, God hears your fears, your worries, your struggles, your concerns. And today, in this sacred listening space, may you be able to quiet yourself as Elijah did, and lean in to listen for the gentle whisper of love and support.

In fact at this time, we are going to take out the Listen booklet you were given (or what you have below), and we are going to take some time to quietly listen for God. Listen to God speak to you what you need to hear. It may be God telling you the answer to a problem. It may be an assurance of God’s goodness, and presence. In this time we will be still to know our God, and when you feel so moved, write, or draw what you feel God is leading you to draw or write on week 1.

Reflection: Appointment with God Let us begin our time of silence and leaning in.

Prayer & Lord’s Prayer:

To the call to listen, O God, we are mindful.

In the search for wholeness, O God, we are hopeful.

For the journey, O God, we are grateful.

We join this prayer with all those offered during this time with you,
and we pray together the prayer of Jesus: Our Father...

Week 1 (write or draw what God is whispering to you in silence- time yourself for 5 minutes)