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***Finding God in Silence***  
***I Kings 19:4-15a***

*But Elijah 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." <sup>5</sup> Then he lay down under the broom tree and fell asleep. Suddenly an angel touched him and said to him, "Get up and eat." <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> 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." <sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> 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?**" <sup>10</sup> 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."*

*<sup>11</sup> 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; <sup>12</sup> and after the earthquake a **fire**, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire **a sound of sheer silence.***

Elijah has just come from an encounter with the prophets of Baal, a false god, and a huge **contest** to prove whose God is real.

Both sides built an altar, and when the prophets of Baal prayed to their god to light the fire on their altar, **nothing** happened.

When **Elijah** prayed to God, fire came down from heaven and lit his altar, and all the water around it, on fire.

It was a moment of **triumph** for Elijah...but it didn't last.

When Queen **Jezebel**, a devotee of Baal, heard that Elijah had killed all her prophets after the contest, she took an oath to kill Elijah!

She said to Elijah, '*So may the gods do to me and more also if I do not make your life like the life of one of them, one of my prophets, by this time tomorrow.*'"

Then Bible says in a great ***understatement***, "Elijah was afraid."  
Elijah is in serious trouble when he runs away to Beersheba....  
So he sits under the tree, and ***gives up*** on life itself.

He is down and ***depressed***.  
And most of us know how he feels, don't we?....  
Ever felt that low?  
I know I have.  
Maybe you feel that way ***right now***....

A lot of us have been in that place, of giving up.  
And there are so many reasons we fall into despair or ***depression***.....  
For many COVID-19 has caused us to feel this way,  
From all the isolation and separation,  
Not to mention the illness itself.  
We know more people who are sick, there are so many hospitalized,  
And people are dying.

Elijah had lots of reasons to be depressed....  
He is being chased by ***evil people***, threatening to kill him,  
He is ***exhausted*** from the big contest on Mt. Carmel,  
He is ***burned out*** as God's prophet,  
He is ***overwhelmed*** by the fact that he is now all alone in the wilderness without anything to eat or drink.

Ever felt ***surrounded*** by enemies?  
***exhausted***?  
***burned*** out?  
Or just ***overwhelmed***?  
If so, you are not alone!

People all throughout the Bible have been there.  
The ***Israelites*** after escaping Egypt felt this way.  
While wandering in the wilderness without food,  
they tell Moses it would have been better for them  
if they had just stayed in Egypt as slaves to die,  
instead of ***dying of hunger*** in the wilderness...

**Moses** felt this way in Numbers chapter 11,  
when he gets so frustrated leading the people  
that he asks God if he could just die!

Feeling this down—it isn't wrong—it isn't a sign of failure.  
It's just *honest*.

And when we come to that honest place...  
the Bible reminds us that *God is right there with us*.  
In the despair, in the depression.  
Especially when we are barely hanging on.

Look at this story--what does *God do* for Elijah?  
Exactly what God does for *any of us* in the same situation.  
God responds.  
God *provides*.

You know what God doesn't do?  
God *doesn't* tell Elijah--*stop whining and complaining*,

Instead, God sends *angels* to give Elijah food and drink,  
Then urges him to *rest*,  
God takes him on a *spiritual 40 day journey* to Mount Horeb  
(AKA Mt. Sinai)—  
the very same place where Moses received the 10 commandments  
and hid in the cleft of a rock, where he personally saw God.

Once Elijah reaches the cave at Mt. Horeb, he hears God asking him,  
“*What are you doing here, Elijah?*”

And again he tells God how *desperate* he is:  
“*I have been zealous for you...but now, I alone am left, and they are seeking my  
life, to take it away*”.

In other words---look, I've done my job for you as a prophet, and now it's over.

That's when God tells him to go stand on the mountain  
and wait for the *Lord to pass by*.

Now just *imagine* what must be going through Elijah's head at this point.  
Stand out on this mountain and *God is going to pass by?*

What does that even mean?

What he sees is first a great *wind*—and God is not in it.  
 Then he feels an *earthquake*—and God is not in that either.  
 Then he sees a great *fire*—and God is not in the fire.  
 Finally, he hears the *sound of sheer silence*. And that is God.

Some of us know the *King James Version of this*—  
 God comes in *a still, small voice*.

The newest English translation, the Common English Bible, puts it this way:  
 "After the fire, there was a *sound. Thin. Quiet.*" (CEB)

Different translations of this passage are possible  
 because the *Hebrew* can be translated in more than one way.  
 The word "*sound*" *can mean "voice"* -- or silence -- but however it is translated,  
 it is something *soft and quiet and still*—  
 in contrast to the *overwhelming* wind, earthquake, and fire that come before it.

For Elijah, God is not in the great pyrotechnics of nature,  
 but rather in the *silence*.  
 The *stillness*.

After God feeds and encourages Elijah with this presence,  
 He is *sent back to work*, as a prophet---  
 With the *energy* he needs to pass the mantle to Elisha,  
 And to see the defeat of the evil King Ahab and Jezebel.

*Silence is powerful.*

If you think about it, Jesus rose from the grave, He was resurrected, *in silence*.  
 No huge fanfare, or pyrotechnics.

*Wonderful things can happen with God, in silence!*

God certainly appears in large, loud ways—  
 like a burning bush, a parting sea, and tongues of fire.  
 But God also comes in silence!

Have you ever found God in *silence, or stillness*?

*Psalm 46* is so famous for reminding us to “*Be still, and know that I am God.*”  
 What does that mean to you?

This story reminds us that ***God is surprising!***  
 Elijah probably expected God in the wind, or fire or earthquake—  
***How has God ever come to YOU*** in an unexpected way?  
 Have you ever been surprised by God?

It reminds me of last week's story—of Jesus using 5 bread loaves and 2 fish,  
 to feed 5000 people!

But ***that's God!***  
 God shows up to help us, in surprising and unexpected ways and places---

So, if God shows up, when we are down,  
 When things are quiet,  
***will we stop long enough*** to just be quiet with God?  
 It's not easy to be still and quiet.  
***Solitude*** does not come naturally for most people,  
 even for introverts who love it.

But it's so powerful.  
 I had the opportunity to do this at our family farmhouse last week...

In the devotional, "*Jesus Calling*", on August 6<sup>th</sup> it says:  
*Sit quietly in my presence while I bless you.*  
*Make your mind like a **pool of water**,*  
*ready to receive whatever thoughts I drop into it.*  
*Rest in my sufficiency, as you consider the challenges this day brings.*  
*Do not wear yourself out by worrying about whether you can cope with the*  
*pressures.....Sarah Young, *Jesus Calling*, pg. 228,*

Make your mind like a ***pool of water***, ready to receive God's thoughts.  
 What would that look like for you?

How can we ***just*** stop and do that today? In the quiet, the stillness?  
 Whether we are ***down or not***, how can we do that?  
 Because the truth is----God is always ***with us***,  
 and God really ***shows up*** in the silence.  
 That is the ***Good News*** for Today!  
 For this gift, all God's people say, Amen.