



ST. ANDREW'S IN THE PINES EPISCOPAL CHURCH

SERMON
8-10-14

What do you do when your world is really troubling you? When you are feeling overwhelmed and/or frightened? Or you feel all alone – like the weight of the world is on your shoulders and there seems to be no one else to help? How do you react?

Because in case you missed it in the Old Testament reading – the prophet Elijah is REALLY frightened. Wicked Queen Jezebel and King Ahab have turned to worshipping Baal and other gods and they have ordered all other people to do so also. All who disobey them are killed. Elijah, of course as one who disobeys, has just had a showdown with some of the King's and Queen's prophets and his God, the God of Israel, has shown forth a wonderful miracle and now the King and Queens are actively searching for Elijah to take his life. His life is in a rough patch, to say the least, and in fear he has fled to the desert to hide in a cave.

What would you be doing? I rather like the idea of hiding out in a cave when you are frightened. That's what I'd probably do if there were good, accessible caves around here. As a substitute, I usually hide out under the covers of my bed. But there are many other ways to act when we are frightened and seeking to escape. Some people get really busy, really busy, filling us their time in busyness, activity. It's similar to the way the terrified disciples reacted up on the mountain when Jesus was transfigured. Peter suggests that they should just get busy and build three dwellings right there on the mountain. All this busyness is like the wind, like the great wind that passes by Elijah. But God was not in the wind.

Sometimes frightened people turn to drink, or drugs, or overeating, or other excessive behaviors-anything to escape, anything to make the troubling feelings, anything to escape reality. But that reaction to fear is like an earthquake. For the person and all those around them, the excessive behavior causes a shaking and a rumbling that makes the ground around them uncertain. And God is not found in an earthquake.

Or anger, anger is another reaction to trouble. NO ONE, no one is going to get the better of me. I'll show everybody. I'll fix this, I'll take care of it. I'll do it my own way and watch out for anyone that gets in my way because I'm on a rampage. And the anger and passion are like a consuming fire. But God is not in the fire.

No – God is found in the silence, the sheer silence and in the listening. The listening to the voice that says, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” The voice that says, “Here is your solution, I will prepare the way for you.” The voice that says, “Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid. – come.”

The Quaker faith tradition is focused on listening for that voice. In their silent worship, they wait to hear what the Spirit will say. They teach about that of the God within everyone. Look, listen, wait. You will get a glimpse of the Lord.

Glimpses of the Lord. Another way to speak of this is to talk about thin places. The thin place is a place where we are able to see and sense the other world. It is a place where the veil between this world and the next is so sheer that it is easy to step through. It is a Holy moment. It is a place of reassurance and renewal.

And those thin places are around. If we are paying attention we can catch glimpses of them and experience the closeness of Christ’s presence. You might think of a thin place as being like a walk on a lake covered with ice. We can feel quite confident walking on thick ice. We know the water is beneath us, but it can’t affect us because of the ice providing a separation. But then we might come to a thin place, a place where the ice is not so thick, in fact sometimes water can be seen seeping through. And then it’s a different experience. With a thin place – we can experience the water in a new way. That thin place for Peter, that moment of treading beyond our normal reality, was actually walking on seething, stormy water. And like Peter, we might touch the water, we can probably see it, and we most certainly know it is there. But it is not the same. So it is when we come to a thin place with our Lord around us.

I’ve watched people experience thin places, and I too have had those thin place moments and heard about them for others. Sometimes before surgery, maybe after prayer, in the quiet of the room, God’s presence surrounds, sweeps over a person, and they know themselves held in loving arms and they know that all will be well. For family sitting by the beside of their dying loved one, the veil parts and we see the world beyond, and we know God’s presence is ushering their loved one to a place of peace.

I’ve seen our old ones in nursing homes come to thin places. In the midst of their afflictions, their tiredness, sometimes I think the impact of numbing drugs, a bowed over, disconnected human being will begin to mutter the Lord’s Prayer and then to sing the hymns of our chapel service – as if the Holy Spirit unbidden brings them back to life.

And so it is when the Lord speaks to Elijah in the sheer silence. And so it is when the disciples see Jesus walking toward them silently upon the sea. God comes close, God is seen, heard, and felt as present. And we know God to be with us. And we can listen to God guiding us. For that is what happens – God guides us right back into the life we are living. God gives Elijah some advice but sends him right back out into the world he had tried to escape. And the disciples have their amazing, miraculous experience and then they have to get off the boat and keep on traveling. It is the way of living in this uncertain world. We can rant and rave, we can cry out, escape, hide, or swirl about aimlessly. We can run and run, or be paralyzed with our questions. But there are thin places where we can meet the Lord. We learn today that thin places can be found in the sheer silence, in listening, paying attention, in going to a place apart. What we

experience in a thin place will always be special, it will reassure us and guide us, but it will also, always send us back into living in this big, huge, beyond us world. We travel on.

Thanks be to God.