

ST GEORGE'S ANGLICAN CHURCH, TRAVENCORE

Sermon - 2nd Sunday after Pentecost (Year C), Sunday June 19, 2022

1 Kings 19:1-4, 8-15; Psalm 22:20-29; Galatians 3:10-14, 23-29; Luke 8:26-39

May the words of my lips and the meditations of all our hearts be for ever acceptable to God, Creator, Redeemer, and life-enabling Spirit. **Amen**

there was a great wind, ... 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.

The author of the First book of Kings does not say that God was in the silence; what he tells us instead is that in that silence, which Elijah heard and experienced as something present, not just as the absence of sound, there was the space to hear and experience the presence of God.

As we travel on our journey through this season of Luke's Gospel, I want to address a number of aspects of two enormous questions, "*where is God? and what is God calling us to do?*" These are questions that have been asked by theologians, philosophers, scientists, and by people of all sorts and of all ages from little children to old women and men across the ages. Some have even been brave enough to offer answers, sometimes quite definitive answers. Those answers have often been inadequate, or too superficial, too complicated, unsatisfying, or just not helpful in a meaningful exploration of the relationship between us and God. None of that is a reason not to seek answers, but we must be ready to find that the answer to our question, and even God's presence itself, is not the same at all times or in all places, and often not at all what we expected it to be!

One thing that we learn from allowing God to be present in the silence is that the experiences of others can help. As we learn from today's reading from the first book of Kings is that, like Elijah, we need to search for God and God's will for us, not in the rush and *busy-ness* of life, not in the noise and violence of the world around us, but in profound silences that lie beyond all the noise and fuss.

Since March, 2020, many have asked, "*where is God in this pandemic?, where is God in this suffering and pain?*" This year a question has been added to pandemic-driven chaos, which has reappeared frequently in our broken world, just with different people involved - "*Where is God in the suffering of the people of Ukraine?*" These questions are not those that Elijah asked as he sought to know what God was asking of him in the midst of the Chaos that was the life of the people of Israel, but the answer that Elijah received still has meaning and wisdom for us today. Finding God, discerning God's presence and discerning God's will not be achieved by looking *in* the violence and noise of the world around us, and certainly will not be found by embracing the frenetic *activity for activity's sake* that often seems so attractive, too often boiling down to saying, "*we have to do something, this is something, let's do it!*" Now I am not advocating the opposite response to the needs we see in the world around us, *doing nothing*. Far from it!

What I am advocating is that we do the twenty-first Century equivalent of Elijah's action; seek God's will in the silence, not in the fury around us. In this season of *ordinary time in the Year of Luke*, we will have the gift of Luke's Gospel to help us to understand God's will. We will be able to do this by contemplating Jesus' approach to dealing with the human condition in the world and thus learning the lesson of serving the neighbors that God has given us, personally and communally, to serve.

Initially, today's Gospel reading, with its violence, its aggressive, shouting evil spirits, and the fearful response of the locals does not seem to offer much help in our seeking God, but there is food for thought in it, nevertheless.

This is one of those stories that needs to be treated with care because of the setting and context in which it is told. It is, for instance a difficult text to use in areas in which pig farming

is an important activity. I got a hint of this in Western Victoria many years ago, but it was most forcibly brought home to me some years later when I spent Christmas on a farm in Minnesota where the raising of pigs was the *main* activity for the family with whom we were staying. Jesus' solution to the dilemma of the evil possession of the man's whole being quite simply made no more sense to the twentieth Century American farm folk than it did to the Gerasene swine herders and their fellow townspeople. The crux of the story is still however valid, and useful.

Jesus was, I believe, telling his disciples that God can indeed bring calm out of the most confusing chaos and fear. Admittedly, this is not a great example and it doesn't have as much for us as does Elijah's experience of the silence, but as we travel with Luke in this season, we will be drawn to several possibilities for learning just what God has instore for us if we will step aside from the violence and noise, the busy-ness and the distraction, of the world and open our hearts and minds to the lessons of the profound silence; to hear what one hymn writer, whom I mentioned last time the First Kings reading was set to be read three years ago, has called the "still small voice of calm."

The Lord be with you.

Richard Murray 18 June, 2022



Prophet Elijah on Mount Horeb, Volterra, Daniele da, ca. 1509-1566