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The Episcopal Church of St. Benedict
Proper 7 – June 20, 2010 (Father's Day)
1 Kings 19:1-15a

Today, we continue with the story of Elijah, the great prophet of Israel, and for us in the Christian tradition, a great forerunner of Jesus.

It is Elijah who stood with Jesus and Moses in the blinding light of the Transfiguration. He was a rather shy but fierce man, who wasn't afraid to tell the truth to big, powerful people,

but if things got risky, he also knew when to get out of town and didn't mind hiding out in the wilderness until things calmed down.

You may have heard this week's story before – Queen Jezebel wants Elijah dead, so he's hiding in the wilderness.

He's on a mountain, waiting for the Lord to pass by... and how will he know it's God? First there's a wind (maybe like the one we just had in that storm the other night!), then an earthquake, then a fire.

But God isn't in any of those things.

All that ruckus and power – and then this strange thing happens that this bible translation calls "the sound of sheer silence."

The Hebrew is a little hard to translate. Other bibles call it a "still small voice," (KJV) "a sound of a gentle blowing" (NASB); or "a gentle whisper" (NIV).¹

Whatever it was, that's what got Elijah's attention.

That's what Elijah knew was God's presence, coming to meet him.

Do we think that the only way God speaks to people is in grand, unmistakable ways?

Is it easy to think God hasn't tried to say anything to us because we haven't seen burning bushes or earthquakes or people raised from the dead?

Or have we just been missing quieter, simpler waves and whispers from our God?

There are probably a lot of things that make noise in your life.

There are probably some things that you can turn off, and some things that you can't. Sometimes we use noise to keep us from noticing things we'd rather not notice, and from facing things we'd rather not face.

Sometimes we use noise to get our adrenalin going, to keep things moving, to feel like we're accomplishing something,

when really, we're just noisy. Busy. Moving. But not really going anywhere.

How does noise affect your ability to feel God's presence in your life?

To feel God's love for you, despite those things in the background that you're not wanting to notice and maybe hoping also that God won't notice?

¹ Thanks to Professor Nancy deClaisse-Walford for this list of translations, at www.workingpreacher.org

How is noise keeping you from really seeing the people around you, even your own friends and family?

If the noise in your life is a noise you can shut off, what if you found a time every day or every week where you intentionally silenced it?

If the noise in your life is a kind you can't shut off, are there ways you can stand apart from it?

Sometimes it's easy to be quiet, sometimes it's not.

Last year, we had a youth group meeting where we talked about silence.

We talked about two kinds of silence -- silence that's uncomfortable or lonely, and silence that's nice -- peaceful, beautiful, restful.

When Elijah feels the silence of God's presence, he doesn't sit back and think, "Oh, isn't this lovely?"

It's not a blissfully peaceful experience.

Meeting God isn't usually about that, or at least that's not how it seems to work in the Bible.

But the silence of God's presence doesn't sound like an awkward or lonely silence either... it's a silence that both makes Elijah want to come out to be with God, and a silence that makes him want to wrap his mantle (or his cloak) around his face.

Whether he's scared, awed... or just forgot to shave that morning.

And when Elijah goes out into the silence to be in God's presence, what does God say to him?

God says: "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

Hey you. What are you doing here? Why are you hiding? What's all this noise you're surrounding your life with?

And Elijah tries to explain... well, I've been doing very righteous things but now this woman wants to kill me, so, of course, now... I'm... um, hiding.

Maybe at this point Elijah is also thinking, "What am I doing here?"

The dangerous thing about shutting out the noise -- of earthquakes or texting or whatever -- is that God might ask us some tricky question like: "What are you doing?"

And then God tells Elijah to stop hiding. To get back on the road.

To keep serving the people of Israel.

Darn. Hiding in the cave was probably sort of safe.

Hiding in a lot of noise -- well, it has its benefits!

But hiding is no way to live our life.

Being constantly distracted is no way to follow our God.

Make space to listen for silence. Make space for the still small voice.

Make space to receive a gentle whisper.

Turn off the noise that you can turn off, and turn away sometimes from the noise that you can't turn off.

Sit in some silence. Look out over the world around you and notice where God might be.

Usually God won't be so loud as to break through the winds and fires that surround our everyday lives... we have to reach for God, just as God reaches for us.

Be like Elijah.

Face into the quiet cave of your own heart, and God will call for you.

Wrap your mantle around your face and go out.

Know that love is waiting for you – a love that might ask you to walk a difficult road, but a love that will protect you and go with you.

Don't let noise take that away from you.

Amen.