

"The Still, Small Voice of the Hiding and Seeking God"

1 Kings 19:8-15

21 August Anno Domini 1994

Pastor Michael L. McCoy
Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Emmett, Idaho

Grace, mercy, peace, hope, and joy to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Baptized,

Despite claims to the contrary, people are seeking contact with God. People within and people without the church, disillusioned with the external world of science and technology, want to know if there is any meaning behind this life that we are living. People are cynical about politics and economics. They are frightened of death and afraid of living. People are searching for answers to the pressing questions of daily life. We all want to know, "How can I know God is real?" "If there is a God, why is there so much evil in the world?" "How do I know He is active in my life?" Ultimately, these questions find their focus in one central issue: "Where in the world can I find God?"

Churches within Christendom have been quick to answer that question, "Where in the world can I find God?" Some will tell you to look within yourself for the spark of good that dwells within all human beings. In other words, the advice given is to "Find the god who comes from your heart." Others tell you to seek encounters with God by speaking in tongues, having charismatic experiences, or new age channeling through crystals. "Look for and make the spectacular and astounding happen in your life." Still others, will tell you that our hope for pleasing God and therefore, finding Him (or Her), is by cultivating society, being tolerant, and thinking good thoughts about everyone -- kind of a worldwide Woodstock.

Such directives still leave people unfulfilled, hurting, wondering, and asking, "Where in the world can I find God?"

The prophet Elijah had the mountain top experience where the LORD sent the fire from heaven and showed everyone there who the real God was. The prophet dragged himself into the desert to die, only to be revived by the LORD and given food for the journey. Please listen to the next portion of the Scriptures and hear ...

... The Still, Small Voice of the Hiding and Seeking God!

So he (Elijah) arose, and ate and drank; and he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights as far as Horeb, the mountain of God. And there he went into a cave, and spent the night in that place; and behold, the Word of the LORD came to him, and He said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" So he said, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets

with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life." Then He said, "Go out, and stand on the mountain before the LORD." And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the 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; and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice. So it was, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave. And suddenly a voice came to him, and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" So he said, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God of hosts; because the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life." Then the LORD said to him: "Go, return on your way to the Wilderness of Damascus; and when you arrive, anoint Hazael as king over Syria."

Thus far the Word of the LORD our God.

With Jezebel as Queen and her husband Ahab as King of Israel, Elijah's future seemed rather short, at best. Had it not been for the food of the LORD given to sustain Elijah, he would have most certainly died in the desert. Though given new life and energy with the divine food and water, the prophet was still very much frightened. Continuing to fear for his life, he makes it to Horeb, the mountain of God. There, seeking asylum in a dark cave somewhere on that lonely mountain, the prophet huddles himself in the dark.

It is at this point that the LORD comes to him and says, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" What a remarkable question! Picture yourself in the place of Elijah -- running away for your very life -- hiding for fear that someone might see you. Just when you think that you are well-hidden and at least safe for the moment, then the LORD says, "What are you doing here?" We might well imagine giving an answer, "Well, LORD, You are seeking and I am hiding. I am withdrawing from this world because it is not where You are feared -- it is not where You are in control -- LORD, it is not where You are. Where are You, God?"

The prophet said it this way: I have been very zealous for the LORD God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life. God's response? Go out, and stand on the mountain before the LORD.

Okay. Now it will be Mt. Carmel and the battle of the dueling prophets again. The LORD will show Himself in power and might and strength. He will Himself go forth so that I will know where in the world the LORD my God is. And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the LORD. A "ruach," a wind, a spirit so powerful that it ripped into the mountainside with such force that boulders were split into pieces. I have a feeling that this is going to be great! My emotions are really pumped up now.

But the LORD was not in the wind. Human emotions are not the place to go looking for God. Our feelings can so easily deceive us. When I feel good, then all is right in the world and God is with me. I have great faith. However, when things go wrong (a sickness, a disappointment, a tragedy, or whatever) I wonder if I have enough faith and I ask, "God, where are You?" So people, don't look to your emotions or feelings to find the LORD. They will deceive you and the LORD your God is the stable Rock of salvation.

Elijah remained standing there and he discovered that the LORD was not in the wind, and after the wind an earthquake. Now, earthquakes are fearful events. If you have ever felt the earth quake you know. In large earthquakes, entire geographic areas (literally thousands of square miles) are lifted and are moved. The earth simply shifts in a tremendous mass movement. Is God in this impressive mass movement of earth? Can I find God there? Is the LORD in any mass movement? For example, if people would all just get together and love one another -- just reach out to one another like "Hands Across America" and sing "We Are The World." Can't human society evolve to a higher level where God would finally be pleased to dwell among us? Well, history has shown that such utopias do not last. Rather than evolving, they decay. If you want to see an example of the remnants after such a mass gathering, go to where the recent Woodstock celebration/orgy/festival took place. Elijah had seen such gatherings where the people had abandoned the LORD God. They tore down His altars and martyred His prophets. So, dear people, don't look for God in the human institutions and societies of this world. And, after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire.

A fire! We know what a fire is like. Except for the littlest of children here, I would guess that every one of us knows what it is like to get burned. We have burnt our tongues, fingers, hands, -- from our toes to the tip of our nose -- we have burnt them on things that are hot. That burning feeling can last a long time. Burning sensations come also from our hearts. Some have described a burning in the bosom. Others have a burning desire that originates from the mind, the intelligence, the human will, human reason, or just from the heart. If someone is looking for God, don't direct that person to the human heart. Neither that person nor you nor I will find the gracious God we need from within. God has promised to reveal himself only in certain places; and the human heart isn't one of them. Jesus said, Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, and slander.

Where, then, O LORD, may my loved ones and I find You? Where in the world are You? But the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice. A still small voice?! What is that? That is nothing, isn't it? You can't find the LORD God Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, and all things visible and invisible, in a still small voice can you?

It is no wonder people ask, "Where in the world is God?" It is clear both from our experiences in life and in the Bible that He can't be found by humans senses or intellect. To be sure, His eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen. And what our consciences have discovered, dear people, in the world around us, is only His hatred for sin, wrath and judgment. The fullness of His love is experienced only when He discloses Himself to us.

The God of the Bible is a God Who is unreachable by human effort and unattainable through human reason. When people come into contact with Him, it is because He has revealed Himself to them. It's not surprising that created beings should be incapable of reaching the Creator under their own power. Since we cannot comprehend Him with our minds, we aren't surprised to find that God is hidden to us. The really astounding thing is that God is actually hiding Himself from us. Isaiah the prophet confessed, Truly You are a God Who hides Himself, O God and Savior of Israel. is that the LORD is a hiding God.

This does not square with the picture of God everyone has in his or her mind. But that's just the problem: the god conjured up in the human imagination is only a projection of our own feelings. The god of human speculation is a false god. He does not exist! Human beings always like to make God

over in their own image. But that god is an idol. The real God of heaven and earth, Who wants to have you as His own, is a God Who hides Himself.

God isn't playing games with us, however. As we dig into the Scriptures, we see that God is really more interested in seeking than hiding. Right after our first parents sinned, God came searching for them, "Adam, where are you?" Jesus defended His concern for a social outcast and said, "The Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost." There no doubt about it; our God is a seeking God. He won't allow us to hide from Him. His love is too great for that.

But why, then, should He hide from us? Why doesn't He reveal Himself openly like a fire and unmistakably like an earthquake and powerfully like a mighty wind? We think that would be the best way to give us comfort and strength in our troubled world. Like Moses, we are not content with God's bare promises. We ask impatiently, "Now show me Your glory, O LORD!"

However, God loves us too much to honor our request. Sinful human beings cannot tolerate God's unveiled majesty and glory. If God would come to us in His power, we would be annihilated by His holiness. No one may see Me and live, He told Moses. And so God hid His glory from Moses in order to preserve the prophet's life. He permitted Moses only a glimpse where He had passed by.

"Where in the world is God?" Well, remember that our God is a seeking God Who hides in order to make Himself known. And He hides in the strangest places! He hid for nine months in the womb of a virgin. On a silent night you might have been able to hear a still, small voice coming from a manger. The voice of God could be heard in the temple when a 12 year old boy asked spoke to the religious scholars of that day. That still small voice spoke during the darkness of daytime as well, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they are doing. A tired and hurting woman, grieving the death of One she cared about, openly weeps in a garden beside an empty tomb. Suddenly, she heard that voice when He simply said her name.

But some may ask, and rightly so, "That was then, and this is now. Where in the world is God right now?" Well, remember that our God is a seeking God Who hides in order to make Himself known. And He hides in the strangest places! In the Word of the Gospel proclaimed in human speech and attached to the humble elements of water, bread, and wine. If we are to find God, we have to let God be God. We must seek Him where He has promised to be found. He promises to be found in His Word.

With a still small voice, in a place where the disciples were hiding, the Incarnate Word said, Peace be with you! Receive the Holy Spirit. As the Father has sent Me, so also I send you. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained. In an upper room, the Voice of the Incarnate God spoke, This is My Body. This is My Blood. This do in remembrance of Me. On a mountain in Galilee, that Voice was heard concerning baptism, As you are going, make disciples of all nations by baptizing them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit And lo, I am with you always until the end of the age.

Just as He spoke through Balaam's ass centuries ago, so He uses unworthy servants today to speak His Word to His people. The LORD uses the vocal cords of pastors today to feed His people with the absolving Gospel and to declare where this gracious God is to be found. This is an awesome reality. The LORD works through such humble means as a man's voice, a bit of water, some unleavened bread, and the fermented fruit of the vine, and that is a humbling realization. When we suddenly

realize that this gracious LORD God is here, right now, coming completely and totally to us through the Word and Sacraments. Such knowledge is awesome, frightening, terrifying, amazing, imposing, and humbling.

We have this picture of Elijah when he stood on that mountain with his mantle wrapped around his face. However, while his eyes may have squinted when the wind rushed down against the mountain, his face was not covered. While his feet may have been braced against the quaking of the earth, his mantle was not over his face. While he may have been startled at the fierceness of the fire, the prophet's mantle was not raised to cover his face. No indeed What caused him to wrap his mantle about him was the still small voice of the LORD God Almighty. It was, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave.

So, with this having been said, is it, "Thank You, LORD; I'm going back into my cave now?" Or, is it, "Thank You, LORD; I'm going back into the world?"

Well, listen dear people, to what that still small voice said to that prophet whose face was wrapped in his mantle: And suddenly a voice came to him, and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" So he said, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God of hosts; because the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life." Then the LORD said to him: "Go, return on your way to the Wilderness of Damascus; and when you arrive, anoint Hazael as king over Syria."

Go, return on your way, -- into the world where you have been called to various vocations -- go, for you are forgiven in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

We pray: LORD God, You have called me out of the world by Your Word in order to bear witness to Your Word in the world. You go with me because Your Word has declared it. I live in the grace of my Baptism where You worked faith in me. In Your Holy Supper Your Church is fed. Go with me as I leave here. You are with me where I live, where I work, where I go to school, when I struggle and hurt and laugh and play. I know that You are with me -- seeking and hiding; hiding and seeking. Please allow me to continue to hear Your still small voice. Amen.