

"A Still Small Voice"

1 Kings 19

We're going to focus our thoughts for a few moments on the story of Elijah at Horeb, the story we've just heard. Elijah has just had his battle with the prophets of Baal, a contest to see which god is real and active. The One True God has won hands down and after that Elijah has executed all the false prophets. At the same time, with the evil influence of the false prophets gone from the land, the rains have started again after a long period of drought. All in all, Elijah should be feeling pretty good. But he's not, because Jezebel, Ahab's queen and patron of the prophets of Baal is out to kill him in revenge for what has just happened. So Elijah rushes off into the desert and feels that life is no longer worth living.

"What are you doing here?"

Out in the desert, Elijah encounters God, and God's first question is an interesting one – one which he repeats a little later on (*v19,13*). That's always a good place to start. Why are **you** here this morning? Have you stopped to think what has brought you here? Habit? Someone else? The need for company? A desire to pray? Anticipation of meeting with God? There's no right answer, of course, but let's pause and think why we're here.

Silence

"The LORD is about to pass by."

Elijah responds to God with his concerns – real, legitimate concerns. His fellow countrymen seem to have turned away from God – effectively ignoring Elijah's preaching – and desecrated the places of worship of the One True God. Many of his colleagues have been killed and Elijah is next on the hit list. This isn't irrational sulking – Elijah really is afraid and with some justification. But God reminds him that he is there too. In fact, he is about to make his presence felt.

Why ever we have come here this morning, whatever is on our minds – whether they are real concerns or imagined problems – God is here nonetheless. His presence is guaranteed when we gather in his name. He wants to meet with us and the difficulties we might be facing and concerns that are occupying our minds are no barrier to that happening.

God is here with us, but sometimes it's difficult to appreciate that. Our minds are full of other concerns. The busyness of everyday life crowds him out. We find it difficult to still our minds and concentrate on meeting God. There's a piece of music by a Scandinavian composer called Lars-Erik Eriksson called *Prelude To God In Disguise*. I don't know anything about the background to the piece but the title talks of God being in disguise – he's not always where we'd expect to find him and he doesn't always meet us in ways that we expect. It's not that he's hidden: it's just that we can't immediately make him out.

Out in the desert Elijah encountered an earthquake, a rushing wind and a fire. This was, for Elijah, God's disguise. He was rather expecting God to communicate with him in a spectacular way. After all, that was the way he usually seemed to do it – thunder and lightning on Sinai (for which Horeb is an alternative name), roaring seas, shouts from the heavens. Often God had needed to do that to attract people's attention, if you like. And often that's the way we want God to speak to us – shouting over all the other things that are filling our lives, calling out more loudly than the myriad other shouts that bombard us from all sides, unmistakably yelling at us over our anxieties and cares. As we'll see, that's not always the way he works. So let's just deal with the anxieties and cares before we go any further. In a few moments of silence, hand them over to God to deal with. Ask for his help in dealing with them and begin to allow God to replace the concerns with his peace.

Silence

“There came a gentle whisper”

When God finally spoke to Elijah it was in a voice of peace – a quiet whisper, a still small voice. There are times when God doesn't attract our attention with the big dramatic stuff. Of course, he can speak to us at the boisterous conferences, the times of powerful and uplifting worship, the great preaching venues. But sometimes he just waits for us to turn our attention completely to him, so that he doesn't have to shout over everything else, but can simply speak into our waiting souls.

“Go back”

When God asks Elijah the second time what he is doing there, Elijah repeats his original answer, full of self-pity and self-righteousness. But God simply tells him to go back there, to go back and confront the problems and dangers. The difference is now that Elijah will know God is with him, he has experienced God, heard God speak, sensed God's encouragement and challenge. It will all be OK. He will be able to go and see all those things from a different perspective – God's perspective.

“He found Elisha”

And not only is Elijah to go back, to re-engage with the powers of evil, he will have a specific task – to anoint a couple of kings and to pass on the prophetic mantle to Elisha. He will not be alone, because God is with him. He will not be alone because there are others who will help him – not just Elisha, but seven thousand other people faithful who are faithful to the One True God.

God doesn't call us to serve him alone, whatever our circumstances. He promises his own presence and he gives us the company, the fellowship of other believers. As we draw to a close, let's pray for our brothers and sisters in Christ, thanking God for their fellowship, friendship and prayers, and praying for their needs and problems.