

Reflection on Sunday 19 June 2022 on Zoom by Kath Oates, Lay Leader of Worship

Reading: 1 Kings 19: 1-15a

The still small voice

Today I'd like to reflect on our first reading from the first book of Kings, specifically chapter 19 and verses 11 and 12 where the prophet Elijah encounters God.

He said, 'Go out and stand on the mountain before the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by.' Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking 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 sound of sheer silence.

Elijah is on the run. He's just experienced a dramatic climax in his ministry when he confronted the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel. The spectacular revelation of God's power in the fire was a great triumph, but also brought the wrath of Queen Jezebel upon him. She vows to kill him and consequently he is trying to put as much distance as possible between himself and his enemies.

The high he must have felt on Mount Carmel is overtaken by the low mood he now feels; so low has he come that he wants to die. God provides for him on his journey in the form of an angel who brings him food and drink and eventually God leads him to Horeb, a holy mountain. Many scholars believe that Horeb and Sinai are the same mountain; which means that Elijah is at the same holy place where God met with Moses in the burning bush and also where he later gave him the Ten Commandments. It's here that Elijah spends the night in the cave and it's here that he too encounters God – not in the wind, the earthquake or the fire, but in what the version of the Bible we heard today calls the *"sound of sheer silence"*.

There are many ways in which God can meet with us. It could be through reading the Bible, through worship, through people we meet, or through nature – though when people say that they meet with God in nature, I suspect they usually mean grassy meadows and babbling brooks rather than earthquakes and fires.

But what about the sound of sheer silence? The King James Version of the Bible describes it as "a still small voice" and in the New International Version it's "a gentle whisper".

The gentle whisper reminded me of a trip to London when my boys were quite young. We went up to the top of St Paul's Cathedral and put the Whispering Gallery to the test. As a child I'd seen it on Blue Peter; with two presenters

sitting on opposite sides of the dome, one with their ear to the wall. One presenter had then turned to the wall and whispered something, which their colleague on the other side had heard loud and clear. We gave it a try and were amazed at how well we could hear each other's gentle whisper.

One of the things which many of us commented on in Lockdown was the sudden quietness, mainly as a result of the reduction in the number of cars on the road. We heard the birds singing; they suddenly seemed much louder than before. But now we are back to normal and it's noisy again.

So where can **we** go to hear God's gentle whisper? How do we make a space where an encounter may happen? How do we, like Elijah, find our own cave?

For each of us it will be different. It may be a simple space at home, maybe where we light a candle to focus on. It may be in the garden surrounded by the beauty of trees and flowers, or in a local park or beauty spot. It may be a real cave, but it needn't be. It simply needs to be a place where our attention can be totally on God.

But let's turn back to Elijah, and **his** encounter with God. It ends with God telling him to go back into society, and so it is for us. Elijah cannot stay in a cave and neither can we. We too need to go where God needs us to be. We don't

always know where our encounter will lead us, but we can rest assured that God will be with us every step of the way.

Last year on my Pioneering Course I wrote a poem to reflect on the subject of the cave as a place of encounter with God. I'd like to share the poem with you now. After I've finished reading it, we'll go into our time of reflection where we can all spend a couple of minutes in a sea cave with just the sound of the water.

The Cave

A place to escape the world's noise

A place where cluttered thoughts are stilled

A place of silence, save for gently lapping waves

The Cave

A place to be solitary, but not alone

A place to be with you, to talk to you

A place to be loved and truly heard

The Cave

A place to contemplate and listen

A place to see through your eyes

A place of refuge, but not home

The Cave

A place of rhythms; ebb and flow of tide

A place now filled with new day's light

Time to leave... the world awaits.



Hear the sound of the waves

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