

GOD STILL SPEAKS – QUIETLY (23rd June 2019 Lindfield)

1 KINGS 19:1-18

Fight or flight are the two major responses when confronted with danger. Sometimes one makes more sense than the other. Our natural instincts often direct our actions. What response offers the best chance of survival? Elijah decided it was flight. He had just defeated all of Queen Jezebel's prophets and now she wants him dead. Off he goes into the wilderness where he hopes he can hide out long enough for her troops to stop looking for him. God even provided food for him just as He had done for Moses and the people of Israel when they were fleeing Pharaoh.

Elijah had proved that God was powerful because he had just seen exactly how powerful in the contest he had witnessed. So, hiding in a cave when an earthquake came Elijah figured that God would speak to him through the earthquake. But he didn't. Then a fire appeared and Elijah knew that God had spoken in a fire before so maybe this was how God would speak. But he didn't. Then came, - nothing. Just quietness, sheer silence. In the silence Elijah heard the voice of God.

In the midst of danger, Elijah told God that he had sought to do what he had been called to do. To bring an evil King to repentance and faith but the King would rather take the advice of his Queen than the prophet of God. Because of his faithfulness, Elijah faced death. "I alone am left and they seeking my life, to take it away." (1 Kings 19:14c)

God listened to Elijah and understood that he needed to feel as though he was cared for by God. He didn't need the power as in an earthquake for he had just seen God's power displayed on Mt Carmel. He didn't need the refining fire because he had remained faithful and strong. He needed the quiet reassurance from God that he was not alone. So in the quiet stillness God told Elijah that he was not alone. "All the knees have not bowed to Baal. There are seven thousand left." (1 Kings 19:18b) Elijah was to anoint others to assist him in restoring the worship and faithful honouring of God that had disappeared under the evil King Ahab.

Following God's instructions he went on his way to Damascus and met the one who would assist him and follow him as Israel's Prophet – Elisha.

We all go through times of loneliness and despair. Times when we feel the world is against us. Everything we do seems doomed to failure. People suffering Depression and Anxiety know exactly what that is like. We think circumstances are beyond our control. No-one understands what we are enduring. Even God doesn't seem to know or care because we have not recognized God as being around for a long time. We may think that God may speak through some dramatic event in our lives and even expect it to happen. Something as dramatic as an earthquake or a thunderstorm – but more often than not God speaks in quieter moments when we have the time to really listen.

God's voice may be heard in the quiet working out of history, such as when the walls of communism came down. After all the suffering it caused it only really lasted one generation. People from Eastern Europe were now reunited with friends and family from the western

side. Apartheid finally came to an end and black and white were seen as equal. The death of MLK Jr brought about the Civil Rights Act in the US and the Referendum in Australia on 27th May 1967 made our First Peoples Citizens and gave them the right to vote.

God's voice is often heard in the daily lives of ordinary people. People quietly doing their jobs in the world often have something to say that encourages us and lifts our spirits, perhaps in the way they say something cheerful to us or do us an unexpected favour.

God's voice may be heard in the birth of a baby or at a wedding or even a funeral. God is present in joy and in sorrow and there at times when those events make us slow down enough to listen to God speaking.

God is with us even in the midst of tragedy. How many times have we looked back and seen how circumstance have come together in a way and we attribute it to good luck or coincidence. With our 20-20 hindsight we have seen an "invisible hand" guiding, and we have attributed it to something other than God. We were guided in a direction, perhaps we first thought silly then when it turned out better than we imagined, we forget to say "Thank you".

A line in a hymn, a phrase in a prayer, a sentence in a sermon – there have been many times when at the door after the Service someone has thanked me for saying something I didn't say. But something I did say triggered a response or a thought or an answer that was helpful. Someone at morning tea or a neighbour says something that triggers something in us that brings about an answer or part of a direction we need at that particular moment. Do we need more faith to believe in luck or coincidence in such circumstances or is it easier, and even more logical to believe in the "still, small voice" of God?

Elijah didn't know there were 7,000 others who had remained faithful and had not bowed down to worship the Baals for Queen Jezebel. When he needed to know, when the time was right, God came and spoke, not in power or rage but in quiet reassurance that all would be well. The faith of Israel would continue through the leadership of Elijah and Elisha and the 7,000 faithful followers.

When we need reassurance, when we are afraid and don't know what to do or where to turn, when we think that maybe even God has forgotten us, the stillness, the quietness rather than the bluster or the ranting or the accusing or the doubting, brings God's voice of love and assurance. "I will send the Holy Spirit to comfort you". Listen for that voice of God and follow Him. That is living by faith. That is trusting God. AMEN
