

Reverend David Peterson's Sermon for June 21st 2025

Small Still Voice

Many years ago, I worked at a place called Camp Columbia on Thetis Island which you may know was a summer camp where children would spend part of their holiday having fun, learning about the Bible and experiencing for many, their first time away from home.

Well one day I arrived a day before anyone else and had the entire camp to myself. I went for a walk on a rainy day and went to a place where countless children and staff met on the side of a hill near camp to have a special service of song and prayer for their last day of camp. This place was a place soaked in prayer.

As I wandered around there, I felt what I can only describe as God's presence... unlike anything I had ever sensed before. And this sense was a tactile sensation, as if I was being touched, a feeling akin to the experience of standing neck deep in water where the pressure of the water lightly rests all over you.

It was a strange experience which did not go. It remained with me for hours and at one point was almost too much to bear. It was even a little uncomfortable but at the same time welcome and I knew I was in no danger.

God was very close to me that day. More so than ever I have experienced before or since. It made me think those scriptures that describe how people encounter God in unexpected moments and unexpected places.

It was for me the closest I have felt to God, the fullest experience of God I have ever had. It was an important part in my growth as a Christian or to use the metaphor, my faith journey.

Now all of us have faith journeys as we live our life and we journey back to God, and we have moments that are good and bad and often somewhere in-between.

Sometimes we have rich moments, tremendous experience of being in God's presence what we call 'Mountain Top Experience' where we are strong and can see the way.

And at other times of our journey, we feel the opposite – perhaps we feel lost and afraid, and these are our 'lost in the wilderness moments' where we just trying to keep going.

Well, recently we had St. Barnabas Day which was on June 11th which is my ordination anniversary as a priest. When I was ordained, my friend Claude Murray preached and, in his sermon, he instructed me as a priest to “gather the people, share the story, bless the cup and break the bread.”

These words have rattled around my head as I looked at the readings this week. Today we have Elijah and he's in trouble. King Ahab and Queen Jezebel are out to kill him and the prophets of Yahweh and have given him a death threat. He does not have anyone to stand with him. He has to escape and go into the harsh desert and he's afraid and exhausted and ready to give up.

This is the man who has been rich in his experiences of God and now is on the run. We are told he gets to the point of exhaustion and falls asleep under a tree. We are told he is awakened by the Angel of the Lord and there before him is bread and water.

“Get up and eat” he is told and so he does. This happens again and the Angel tells him to eat so he'll have strength for the journey.

This gives him enough strength to travel 40 days unto Mount Horeb which you will also know as Mt. Sinai, the holy mountain where Moses received the Law. And somewhere on the mountain he finds a cave to sleep. And somewhere in the silence the Word of the Lord comes to him and asks him “What are you doing here Elijah?”

And Elijah says I am here because of my faithfulness to God. The Israelites have turned away, the prophets are murdered, they are seeking my life and I'm all that's left!

And God gives him a sign. There blows a great wind that shatters the rocks – but God is not in the wind. There is an earthquake following but God is not there either. A firestorm passes by but God is not there and then there is the sound of sheer silence.

Then Elijah, deafened by the silence hides his face in his cloak. And in the silence God speaks. “What are you doing here Elijah?” he is asked again. And God instructs him to begin a journey again back into the wilderness. And we are told he is given instructions to anoint a new king and to anoint Elisha as his successor as prophet and he will no longer be alone in his work.

Elijah in this scripture experiences highs and lows in his faith journey – from being on the run, afraid, beaten down, to being empowered in his mountain top experience and given strength and hope and vision again.

Most of us will never have such moments.

For the vast majority, faith journeys will have ups and downs and a lot of in-between but rarely such drama. That's where most of us live our faith lives.

Perhaps my friend Claude had this in mind when he preached saying “gather the people, share the story, bless the cup and break the bread.”

Perhaps like Elijah we are given what we need for the part of the journey we're in. Elijah's faith journey also reminds us that God can appear in many ways – and also in unexpected places – it's up to us to look and hear carefully.

So in our faith journey we need to find where our faith is strengthened and our sacrament of communion is nourishment and feeds our souls. It

gives us a little bread and a little wine for our thirst and we hear again stories that remind us who we are, who we belong to and what our purpose is.

So they are our provisions on this faith journey. Our friends here are our companions. Like any journey, we must pace ourselves. Enjoy the good moments and when the wilderness becomes fierce know that God still knows the way.

And we must know where the wells are, the wells that nourish our souls when they are thirsty... so we must bring a shovel for when the wells get low – then dig deeper for new wells. Look for the signs God leaves for you. They may be hard to see and remember Elijah who found God's signs in unexpected places.