

**Sermon**  
**5 November 2017**  
**West Kirk of Calder & Polbeth Harwood**

**By: Rev Dr Jonanda Groenewald**

**Text: 1 Kings 19:1-18**

**John 12:27-28**

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God was in the quiet. In the stillness. In the gentle whisper... (*Silence*)

God was where his prophet didn't expect him to be.

How would you expect the Almighty God, the Creator of heaven and earth, to appear to you?

In some extraordinary way, like in a powerful wind that tears mountains apart and shatters rocks, or maybe in an earthquake, or maybe even in a blazing fire...

In the stories we read in the Old Testament, God appeared to his people in all these ways, and Elijah was probably expecting God to appear to him in one of those ways too.

But God didn't, he appeared in the gentle whisper. Because THAT is what Elijah needed at that point in his life.

Elijah was a mighty prophet. He did great things in the name of God. But now he was at an absolute low-point in his life. The evil queen wanted to kill him, and he was fleeing for his life.

I don't know exactly what went through his head, he should have been on a high after defeating all the prophets of the idol Baal, but instead he felt scared and alone.

He found himself in an "in-between-time". Like when you have had medical tests done, but you don't have the results yet. Like when you have written an exam but you won't know how it went for a while.

An *in-between-time*. And during times like these we very easily feel anxious and uncertain about our future. Isolated and alone.

Depressed even. And this is exactly where Elijah was in his life. He went into the wilderness to hide away from the evil queen, but then just gave up on life.

What was the point of trying to flee? She would catch him at some point. Even if he got away, he'd have to spend the rest of his life in hiding and looking over his shoulder all the time.

And what would it matter if he died in any case? He'd been working so hard for God almost all his life, and he didn't seem to be seeing any results. He felt that his life was worth nothing.

*Have you ever been there? In an in-between-time, struggling to see the point of your life? Feeling isolated and depressed and even sorry for yourself?*

So Elijah gave up. He sat under a wee tree, waiting to die. If he just sat there, the scorching sun would eventually cause his death. But God wasn't going to allow that to happen.

He gave Elijah what he needed – food and drink and the reassurance that he wasn't alone. God sent an angel to touch Elijah, to pull him out of his misery.

Elijah ate and drank, but then just fell asleep again. So the angel woke him up a 2<sup>nd</sup> time and told him to eat and drink, because otherwise the journey ahead would be too hard for him.

God knew exactly what Elijah needed, and he gave it to him. God knew exactly what the journey ahead looked like for Elijah, and he wasn't going to send him on it alone, he would walk with him all the way. Elijah might have given up on himself, but God didn't give up on him.

*And you know? God does exactly the same with us. He'll never give up on us. Not even in the in-between-times, when we feel as if we are in limbo. When we can't see the point of our lives, when we don't have the energy or the courage to carry on, when we seem to have reached the end of our road – God sees beyond that.*

*And he'll give us what we need to realize that too! It might be sustenance to give us the strength for the journey ahead, it might be someone to comfort us and nudge us in the right direction.*

So Elijah got up when he realised that God hasn't given up on him. That even when he ate and then ignored the angel, God still didn't give up on him.

If he needed to eat and drink twice to build up strength for his journey ahead, he must have known that it wasn't going to be an easy journey, but somehow he managed to get up and get going, because he knew he wasn't alone.

*Has God ever sent you an angel when you were down and low? A friend, a kind stranger, or even just someone else living alongside you unknowingly showing you that your life is important? That you matter? God doesn't send us out into the world without giving us exactly what we need for our journey ahead.*

God was using more than his angel to reassure Elijah. He was using all Elijah's knowledge of the past as well. Elijah knew how God used Moses to lead his people away from captivity all the way to the Promised Land.

A difficult journey, with lots of highs and lows, but a journey that in the end turned out to be more than worth it.

Just like Moses had to lead God's people through the desert, Elijah found himself in the wilderness too.

Just like God fed his people with manna when they were hungry, God gave Elijah bread and water from heaven.

Just like Moses met God on a mountain and spent 40 days and 40 nights there, Elijah had to travel for 40 days and 40 nights to meet God on the mountain. And then, when God appeared to him, he covered his face, just like Moses did. Because he knew he was in the presence of God...

So, when all these things were happening to him, Elijah would have remembered how God was with Moses every step of the way, and that would have reassured him that God would be with him too.

*Look back at your life, and see all the times God carried you or your family members or your friends. And these memories will be like petrol in your empty tank.*

But to come back to Elijah – then, there on the mountain, God spoke to him. Not through the mighty wind, like he spoke to others before, not through the earthquake, like he spoke to others before, not through the fire, like he spoke to others before...

Here we are reminded that we are all individuals and that God treats us like that. Because Elijah would have expected to hear God in the wind, earthquake or fire; but then God surprised him, and spoke to him in a quiet whisper.

God reclaimed Elijah for his service, he called him – again. He showed him that he hadn't given up on him. And he gives him clear orders as to what he is to go do to sort out the mess in Israel.

Elijah did as God asked him to do, his life had purpose again. And in the end God was true to his word – the evil queen died before she could get to Elijah, and Elijah was free to fulfil God's wishes.

*No matter how dark and uncertain our futures look – God has a plan for us, and he'll help us to fulfil this plan.*

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And even all these years later, God still speaks to us today.

But not always in the ways we would expect him too.

We live in quite a noisy world. Lots of this noise we make ourselves – tellies are always on, music plays in the background, we talk and scream and laugh – and there is absolute nothing wrong with this, as long as we never allow the noise to drown out the voice of God.

Because exactly like God was with Elijah, he is with all of us too, and he talks to us all the time.

Elijah listened. Do we?

God talks to us all in different ways. Because he knows what we will hear.

He knows us, because we are his children.

I know that if I shout at my boys it will give them a fright, but because I know them well, I know that if I sit them down and talk to them quietly, they'll listen to me.

Just like that God knows us. Some of us sometimes need a proper kick from behind before we will listen, others just need a gentle nudge on the arm.

Very often God will speak to us in ways we don't expect him to, in times that surprise us, because he is not predictable. The important thing is that we listen.

The fireworks here in the village on Friday evening were truly spectacular. Although it was freezing outside, while I was looking up at the beautiful painting being made on a pitch black canvas, I completely forgot about my frozen toes...

My youngest, Nehan, wasn't as excited as I was about the fireworks though... To be honest, he didn't want to go at all. I had to beg, bribe and even threaten him to get him there – because he is scared of the loud banging noises.

But I promised I would hold him tight, and I covered his ears as well as I could, and although the poor wee boy was shaking before it started, in that in-between-time, he ended up enjoying it very much!

He didn't expect to, but he did. And I know that's because I held him tight. He didn't have to be scared, because he wasn't alone.

In his hour of need, God spoke to Jesus too. It was not long before he would die on the cross. He was in an in-between-time, and scared. But he realised that God had a plan with him. So instead of asking God to change his fate – he looked up and said: Father, glorify your name!

Let's all do that. Let's look life in the eye and truly live to glorify God's name.

Just like he asked Elijah, God is asking all of us this morning too: "What are you doing here?"

*What are we doing here?*

We are instruments in the hands of God. We are here to make a difference. And we can just do this quietly. We don't have to charge out here and take the world by storm.

But little by little, step by step, we can bring the changes God wants us to bring.

Because we live in such a noisy world, when it's very quiet, we think that there is nobody there. But that's wrong. God is ALWAYS there.

Just listen... and you'll hear him talk straight to your heart.

Amen