2nd Sunday after Pentecost – Blue Hill, yr. c, 6/22/2025

Psalm 42; 1 Kings 19:1-14; Luke 8: 26-39

Sounds of Silence – Rev. Dr. Deborah M. Jenks

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“Hello darkness my old friend, I’ve come to talk with you again,

because a vision softly creeping, left its seeds while I was sleeping,

and the vision that was planted in my brain, still remains

within the sounds of silence.” (Paul Simon)

As I began pondering the scripture readings for this Sunday, this verse from Paul Simon’s well-known song kept resounding in my mind. The clamor and the chaos, wars and rumors of war, the bombardment of voices from all directions loudly pointing fingers, calling for retribution and redress, loud with a rhetoric of strength and power, fear and threat – all of it resounds even as we seek to understand, to find reassurance, find hope, and God’s grace, God’s love, God’s justice in all of it. How do we distinguish what is from God and what is not? I’m powerfully reminded of a question I got asked from middle school youth in my Sunday School class, “How do you know if something is true?”

So we try to reassure our children, reassure ourselves, that there is a loving trustworthy steadfast presence we know as God the Creator and Sustainer who will redeem and bring all things to that wholeness we long for ... As Psalm 42 sings, “As a deer longs for flowing streams, so longs our souls for God, so our souls thirst for the living God ... when shall God come?” (cf. Ps. 42)

The questions from our scripture readings echo and persist as we come to worship, as we seek God’s presence, God’s comfort, God’s righteous power:

“Why are you cast down, O my soul, why are you disquieted within me? ... Where is your God?” (Ps. 42)

“What are you doing here, Elijah?” (1 Kings 19)

And from Jesus, “What is your name? Who are you?” (Luke 8)

The prophet Elijah, zealous for the Lord, driven to call the people of Israel back to the worship of the One God, engaged the prophets of other gods to show how much more powerful the God of Israel was. And after having overwhelmed them with the power of God, he found nothing changed. And under threat he fled to Mt. Horeb, Sinai, and into a cave. There the voice of God said to him, “Why are you here, Elijah?” Elijah replied, “I am moved by zeal for the Lord, the God of Hosts, for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars ... I alone am left.” And God says to him, “Go out and stand on the mountain, for I am about to pass by.” There was a wind so strong it split mountains and broke rocks to pieces, but God was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but God was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but God was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. ... Then there came a voice, “What are you doing here Elijah?”

God is not in the wind, God is not in the earthquake and fire ... God is not in our loud cries for justice, our desire for retribution, our clamor for safety and security, God is not even in our impulse to use the power for good, to force change, compel justice. ... after the wind, the earthquake, the fire ... God is a still, small voice, a whisper, a sound of sheer silence.

What are we doing here? ... It can often feel as if we are all possessed by myriad voices, clamor and noise, opinion and offense, needs and fears; all piled up and sounding in our ears 24 hours 7 days a week. Its no wonder we so often latch onto whatever we can hold on to ... For some human beings, what we latch onto is ourselves, trying to be in control of something. So we strike out at any who insult, who affront. We raise our voices at whatever challenges, threatens, or makes us feel as if the ground is giving way under our feet. And some get to a point of madness, so filled with hatred and hurt that they hurt and destroy so much ... so many.

After the wind, the earthquake, the fire, the sound of sheer silence. ... a still, small voice. What are we doing here?

“As a deer longs for flowing streams so my soul long for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. ... Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me?” (from Psalm 43)

In one of those odd synchronicities through which God’s Spirit seems to show up and move in and through us I came across a quote from a book by the poet Christian Wiman called *My Bright Abyss: Meditation of a Modern Believer.* This is what I read: “Silence is the language of faith. Action – be it church or charity, politics or poetry – is the translation. As with any translation, action is a mere echo of its original ... especially as it moves farther from its source. ... while it is true that action degrades that original silence, ... it is also true that without these constant translations into action, that original, sustaining silence begins to be less powerful, and then less accessible, and then finally impossible.” (Wiman, 107)

What are we doing here? Why are we gathered as God’s people in church, and why do we keep gathering? After the wind, the earthquake, the fire, the sound of sheer silence. My faith, my intuition, my life in relationship to God and my fellow human beings lead me to respond that maybe its because we need to keep putting ourselves in position to listen for that original silence that is the language of faith, that is where God’s presence can be known ... translate it into action ... and then return to listen to the sound of silence again.

All that we, all that human beings yearn for, all restoration and wholeness comes, not from the noise and the clamor, but from the center of that sound of silence, that still, small voice, that gentle whisper of God.

What are we here for? Why are we the church of Jesus Christ? To find ways to provide place and opportunity to encounter God in the sound of sheer silence, and translate it into actions that can restore people to wholeness, to the fullness of life that is God’s desire for all of us in all our God-given diversity, our uniqueness, and fragile beauty.

I think of the man possessed by demons, making his home among the tombs, never able to turn off the clamor that left him naked and unhinged. And then Jesus came, and asked, What is your name?

“And the people bowed and prayed to the neon god they made. And a sign flashed out its warning, in the words that it was forming. And the sign said, “The words of the prophets are written on subway walls and tenement halls, and whispered in the sounds of silence.” (Paul Simon)