

Pentecost 9, Proper 14
Church of the Good Shepherd, Silver City, NM

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The Voice of God

Just sit quietly for a moment. Get in touch with your weight on the pew, the sounds in the Nave, and beyond, your own breathing, maybe even your heartbeat. Let all the distractions of the day melt away for a moment. You may have something on your heart that is eating at you. It may be a family situation that gives you heartburn. It may be someone whose actions you can't get off your mind. It may be a person in your past who has been cruel, thoughtless or malicious. Let them go for now. Cut them free from the moorings they have in your heart. You are not those conflicts, you may have experienced them, but they are not you. The real YOU is deeper still.

You may have a question hanging over your head, a situation that needs resolving and you don't know how, or you do know, but you are loath to do it, or maybe a future that is unclear, maybe even foreboding and dark. You may feel alone and wish you had someone. You may feel crowded and wish you had some solitude. Let it go for now. Cut these situations free from the NOW in which we sit. You are not these question marks, you may experience them, but they are not you. The real YOU lies deeper still.

You may have glorious days ahead of you. Perhaps you are on track for a big honor, or just received one? Your most cherished relationships are life-giving and energizing, you have tasks ahead of you that you look forward to with eager anticipation. Life is good, and you are grateful. Let it go for now. Cut these situations free to be what they will when they are to be. You are not these joys any more than you are the sorrows. You experience them, yes, and I am happy for you, but they are not you. The real YOU lies even deeper still.

The best responses to these situations, whether fun or painful, do not lie in the situations or the people or the relationships. They arise from the real YOU, from deep within where the Spirit of God speaks and you hear.

This is not merely some esoteric meditation practice. Elijah had to learn this lesson. Jezebel the queen had put a price on his head and he had fled. He felt all alone, defeated and banished. He hears the word of the Lord come to him: "What are you doing here, Elijah?" The answer he gives is a justification for having fled in fear: "All the servants of the Lord have been killed, I alone am left, and they seek my life, too." As if to mirror his inner state, there comes wind, fire and earthquake. His life indeed feels like a whirlwind, chasing along blowing dust and trash around, a blazing fire out of control,

consuming good and bad alike, and an earthquake where all that was solid is no longer trustworthy. But then God sends a still, small voice. At first Elijah doesn't understand. God asks the same question again, and Elijah answers with the same excuses. But God does not listen to his excuses. Instead God sends Elijah on a divine mission. He is not the fearful victim of rampant evil, he is the prophet of the Lord, with work to do. "Go," says God, "and do my work." And besides, you're not alone.

Peter had to learn this lesson, too. If I were in his shoes I would be caught up in the moment. Jesus has just fed 5000 men, plus women and children. The people are rumbling that Jesus should be king and throw off the yoke of the Roman Caesar, be an independent nation like it should be, as God's chosen people, regain the lost glory of David. If he could feed 5000 in the wilderness, could he not be the Messiah? Peter had helped Jesus. He was sure of it; they had made an association between this amazing Jesus and his right-hand-man, Peter. Maybe he would be the next Secretary of State! So Jesus does his little disappearing trick and goes up into the mountains to pray. That's alright, Peter gets to lead the show in dismissing the crowds. Then he would lead the disciples back to the other side of the Lake. He was acting like Secretary of State already!

But then the wind and the waves come. The hullabaloo of Peter's heart is mirrored in the forces of nature. The wind and the waves are exhilarating, but as a fisherman Peter knows they can also kill you! Maybe, just maybe he bit off more than he could chew. But he would face that later. For now, it's row and hope, row and hope. As a fisherman that's what he knew you had to do.

But what's this? The ghost of a dead man striding across the water! What else could it be? Jesus tried to swim out to the boat and didn't make it! And then the "ghost" speaks—it is Jesus, but he's not dead, he's very much alive and waling on the water! The heights of glory give way quickly to the pits of fear. Like Elijah, he goes from high to low in an instant. (Sound familiar?) If only he could walk on the waves like Jesus! Then his problems would be over, he'd have power like Jesus. He'd be great again like Jesus.

Jesus says, in what I imagine to have been a still, small voice, "Come, Peter." For a moment Peter hears the voice, and nothing but the voice. He steps out onto the face of his turmoil and rises above it. He is listening with his heart, not his eyes and ears. He is living from his truest, deepest self. But then the turmoil of the moment comes flooding back in. He loses the voice, the other voices crash in on him, and the turmoil of his ups and downs almost swallows him. They would have had not Jesus spoken again.

The still, small voice speaks in the midst of the storm, "Peter, why did you doubt?" The

voice of Jesus speaks in the depths of our heart, reminding us that our lives do not consist either of the ups or the downs. It calls us to that true inner self where we hear the voice of God.

From the quiet comes the voice of God. Our desires and our passions have the potential of bringing us great pleasure and accomplishing much good, but they also have the power to make our lives a tumultuous parade of wind, fire and earthquake with little or nothing to show for it. If this is what we think we are, our lives will always be a rollercoaster of drama and disaster. But we are not our desires and our passions. We are deeply loved souls who have the capacity to know that love in our innermost, truest being. Here and here alone the truth of who we are is spoken, here and here alone can we truly see the face of God. And from here and here alone do we rise to our noblest and fullest humanity, the kind we see reflected in Jesus. From here and here alone do we go out into the world in the power of the Spirit to do the works of God.

So once more, take a moment. The voice of God does not speak in the wind, the fire or the earthquakes of our lives. It speaks in the quiet place deep within. So sit quietly. Let the ups and downs of your life slip away. As Jesus said, "sufficient unto the day is the trouble thereof." Let it go, good or bad, equally. Sit in quiet silence. Hear the voice of God. That voice will direct you and equip you as it did Elijah and Peter. From here there is nothing to fear, nothing over which to obsess. The voice of God will always direct you back out into the world. It will give you something to do, something for which to pray, something to give—not what you thought, perhaps, but what you ought; not what your superficial, over-concerned and underequipped ego would have you do, ask or give, but what your inner being is truly capable of.

From here and here alone the world is transformed and the Kingdom comes.