Sermon – A Still, Small Voice
Scripture: I Kings 19:11-15, Luke 8:26-39
Trinity Sunday, June 22, 2025
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In our first scripture reading, I Kings 19:11-15, we encounter Elijah, who was a prophet to the Northern Kingdom of Israel during the 9th century BCE. Elijah is distraught, paralyzed by his fear, and hiding in a cave from the wrath of an evil monarchy of King Ahab and Queen Jezibel. Elijah spoke to power in a humiliating confrontation between Yahweh and the Canaanite idol god Baal which ended in the death of many and is afraid for his own life. Rather than permit Elijah to die, Yahweh sends an angel to prepare him for Yahweh's self-disclosure. The result of Elijah's encounter with God is to become reenergized and ready to lead those who are attempting—against all odds—to be faithful to Yahweh. Hear now what the spirit is saying

11 He (the angel of Yahweh) said (to Elijah), "Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by." Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; 12 and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still, small voice (a thin whisper). 13 When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then there came a voice to him that said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" 14 He answered, "I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away." 15 Then the Lord said to him, "Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus; Amen

In our New Testament scripture reading, Luke 8:26-39, we are reminded that the battle which Elijah confronted in the 9th century between good and evil continues in the first century as Jesus encounters a man tormented by demons. The demons rightly see Jesus as a menace who will engage destructive forces and destroy them. It is the nature of Jesus' authority to threaten inhumane and oppressive powers, sometimes directly, sometimes subversively. Hear now the Word of God. Our second scripture reading for today, Romans 5, is one such passage. Paul recognizes the suffering that is a part of life and affirms the love of God which will not disappoint us. This perspective allows us to live lives that not only accept the challenges and struggles but also receive strength, character and hope through them. Hear now God's Holy Word.

26 Then they arrived at the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. 27 As Jesus stepped out on land, a man of the city who had demons met him. For a long time he had worn no clothes, and he did not live in a house but in the tombs. 28 When he saw Jesus, he fell down before him and shouted at the top of his voice, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me"— 29 for Jesus had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. (For many times it had seized him; he was kept under guard and bound with chains and shackles, but he would break the bonds and be driven by the demon into the wilds.) 30 Jesus then asked him, "What is your name?" He said, "Legion"; for many demons had entered him. 31 They begged him not to order them to go back into the abyss. 32 Now there on the hillside a large herd of swine was feeding; and the demons begged Jesus to let them enter these. So he gave them permission. 33 Then the demons came out of the man and entered the swine, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was

drowned. [34] When the swineherds saw what had happened, they ran off and told it in the city and in the country. [35] Then people came out to see what had happened, and when they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind. And they were afraid. [36] Those who had seen it told them how the one who had been possessed by demons had been healed. [37] Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them; for they were seized with great fear. So he got into the boat and returned. [38] The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him; but Jesus sent him away, saying, [39] "Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you." So he went away, proclaiming throughout the city how much Jesus had done for him. Amen.

The title of the sermon: A Still, Small Voice

Text: "Then there came a voice to him that said, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?'" I Kings 19:13b

Let us pray: Holy and Loving God, Thank you for the thin whispers of your still, small voice in each of our lives. And now, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our minds be of sober judgement and acceptable in your sight. Amen.

It was Saturday, March 4, 1933. Americans across the country gathered around radios in their homes and workplaces to hear their newly elected President, Franklin D. Roosevelt address the nation. They were living amid the devastating depression, and the people were looking for words of hope.

I am certain that my fellow Americans expect that on my induction into the Presidency I will address them with a candor and a decision, which the present situation of our Nation impels. … So, first of all, let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself—nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance. In every dark hour of our national life a leadership of frankness and vigor has met with that understanding and support of the people themselves which is essential to victory. I am convinced that you will again give that support to leadership in these critical days.

The only thing we have to fear is fear itself—This morning let us explore the truth of these words considering the fear that paralyzed Elijah and the people who encountered the healing power of Christ.

As Peter and I talked about this quote, he commented what an interesting choice of words Roosevelt made when he said fear *"paralyzes needed efforts."* What many of the Americans listening to him on the radio that day did not know was that their new president was paralyzed. When Roosevelt was 39 years old, following a day sailing at their summer home at Compobello, a small island off Maine, Franklin felt sick when he got home and went to bed. The next morning, he had a fever and three days later he could not move his legs. Franklin Roosevelt had polio.

When Franklin D. Roosevelt spoke of *"paralyzing needed efforts"* he spoke as one who understood the struggle of fighting paralysis on a profound, personal level. He spoke as one who had faced his greatest fear and overcome tremendous physical obstacles. He spoke as one who did not retreat when it would have been understandable to do so. He spoke as one who risked moving forward with his convictions to lead our nation through a difficult and devastating depression.

Surely Roosevelt would agree that not all fear is irrational. A certain amount of fear is necessary and healthy. Em Griffen affirms this in his book The Mind Changers, which is a study of motivation. The Book of Proverbs teaches that *the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.* A reasonable amount of fear and respect for the unknown is healthy.

The prophet Elijah's fear was far from irrational and his decision to retreat was self-preservation. Perhaps Elijah was never more aware of his humanity than the time he spent in that cave rethinking his courageous confrontation of King Ahab's deceitful, immoral, and greedy behavior. Overwhelmed by the circumstances and threat on his life, feeling vulnerable and frightened, Elijah finds comfort and strength in the still, small voice of God.

Great interest has been expressed by interpreters over the years in the manner which God ultimately speaks to Elijah. It is not in a great wind, or in an earthquake, or in fire that God speaks. It is in, as the King James and Revised Standard Version have it, "a still small voice." The literal Hebrew means something like a "thin whisper." The contrast is between the violence of the wind, quake, and fire, on the one hand, and, on the other, the gentle cadences of God's whisper, speaking tenderly to one who is in great fear and calling forth one's better angels from within.

The still small voice of the Holy One in this grace-filled moment reminds Elijah that he is not alone. In this life-changing encounter, the immortal invisible God Only Wise whispers a simple and sobering question: *What are you doing here, Elijah?* In that moment, held in the presence of God, Elijah is able to move beyond his paralyzing fear, to remember who he is and to whom he belongs. The living God's still small voice within renews his sense of conviction and courage and empowers him to return on his way to the wilderness of Damascus speaking truth to power and advocating for those without a voice in his time and place.

Almost a millennium later, the struggle between good and evil continues as Jesus heals the man who is tormented with demons too many to name. The demon who cries out "Do not torment me" rightly perceives Jesus as one who will engage destructive forces and destroy them. Jesus' still small voice effects an amazing transformation from terror to wholeness within this individual. The details of the before and after are stunning. The one who was once banished, living in the caves, naked, uncontrollable is given his life back, a right mind, sober judgement, clothes, and the power to become a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Two millenniums later we continue to see the struggle between good and evil in our world today and fear is alive and well among us.

The fear is intended to make us tight and rigid and to hang on to what we have so as not to lose our status quo. The fear is projected on to others by demonizing and scapegoating those marginalized in our society. The fear is meant to make us retreat rather than advance, to draw back and bury ourselves rather than risk holding on to what is right and advocating for other people.

Yet our faith demands risks--vulnerability, confrontation, and tenderness. The still small voice of the One who risked embracing the cross, conquering evil on our behalf, speaks with gentle strength to remind and encourage us to face the fear.
Eleanor Roosevelt understood the fear her husband was talking about when he addressed the nation in 1933. She looked fear in the face throughout her life fighting for the rights of the poor

and marginalized in our country and around the world. She offers this advice in her book *You Learn by Living* published in 1960.

You gain strength, courage and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face. You are able to say to yourself, 'I lived through this horror. I can take the next thing that comes along.'…You must do the thing you think you cannot do. (You Learn by Living)

May God give us the grace to do the things we think we cannot do, to face our fear, and to recognize the demons among us without demonizing others. May we listen to the still, small voice of our loving God who brings wholeness out of terror, who restores our souls, and who empowers us on the way to the wilderness of Damascus. So be it. Amen.