

## “Alone with Your Thoughts”

Sermon by Dan Harrison, Pastor—Church of the Covenant, Lynchburg, VA 3/22/20

1 Kings 19:11-13

*The Lord said, “Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.” Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.*

In these uncertain times where the Coronavirus has forced us into self-isolation from one another, it is perfectly reasonable to be anxious and afraid. It’s in moments like these that we typically find ourselves in desperate need for God. And we ask ourselves, “God, where are you?” It is also in times like these that we start to question *everything*. We fall head first into deep introspection, we replay things from the past—our *would’ve*s, *should’ve*s, and our *what if*’s... our mind drifts everywhere as we find ourselves, at least for some of us—for the first time in a long time, truly alone with our thoughts.

And my question for you this morning is, “How are your thoughts treating you so far?” Which is another way of saying, “How are you treating you so far?” Last week we discussed loving others, even our enemies through grace and forgiveness. Some of us just watched a short video clip where I discussed my grandfather “Pawpaw” and his struggle with forgiving himself after taking the life of his friend by accident. We have learned over and over that forgiveness of others begins by first being able to forgive ourselves. What is God telling you these days? Is God saying, “keep replaying all your regrets in your mind, over and over and wallow in the misery it has caused you”? Is God saying, “I love it when you are paralyzed out of self-loathing!”? No, of course not. God isn’t saying any of those things. Some of you may then say to yourselves, “Well, I don’t hear God at all.” So then your question to me might be “How can I hear God’s voice?”

As we just read about the prophet Elijah. All sorts of catastrophic events visited him while he was on the mountain: A great wind came, so forceful that it actually moved the rocks (but it says God wasn’t in the wind); then an earthquake came (but it says God wasn’t in the earthquake); then it says a fire came (but it says God wasn’t in the fire). Now, it’s not to say that Elijah’s attention wasn’t on high alert for God after experiencing all of these natural phenomena—much like us with the Coronavirus right now. We are perhaps, due to the severity and seriousness of the pandemic, are increasingly more sensitive to God’s voice in times of crisis. We want to hear something from the Lord! So, we open our ears. We open our mind. We open our eyes. And we open our hearts. We invite God’s presence. We want God’s message of hope and love. We crave it. And much like in the story of Elijah, we are looking for it! But like the prophet, we don’t find it in the pandemic itself or the wind, or the earthquake or the fire. No. Scripture says God came in a gentle whisper. Wow. It wasn’t in any of the loud obnoxious things at all; no, God came in the silence after. Now many of us are in that state of silence. We have shut everything off. If you listening to this message then you have undoubtedly shut other things off. Now we are in the thick of silence, together. Can you hear it. What is God whispering to you?

Maybe we have a clue in the passage itself about what God is intending for us to do when we hear the whisper in the silence—another ancient mystery revealed, if you can believe it. In the Scripture, it says that, *“When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.”* Many when they preach from this story, focus on the cloak over the face, but I want to draw our attention to the fact that Elijah had been in a cave. Yes, it appears he had been in a cave the whole time... that’s right—during the wind, during the earthquake, during the fire. Why? Because he was undoubtedly seeking shelter. Much like us today, protecting ourselves—staying in our homes away from others so as not to contract the virus and then infect others. We are all doing our part to keep our communities safe. I think we can learn something here though... God drew out Elijah to the mouth of the cave, to the entrance, on the threshold of the rest of the world. And God did it in a gentle whisper.

I feel like for us as a community, though we are isolated in our homes, seeking shelter from terrifying harm, at the same time we are drawn by our Creator to stand at the entrance and view the world. Don’t just get caught up in being “alone with your thoughts.” Introspection is fine to a point, but then one must turn their gaze outward into their community, into the world, see how we can help one another. Do not forget each other during this time. Reach out. We need each other now, perhaps more than ever before. Find a way to be virtually present with one another. God is drawing us to one another!

Now I appreciate Jesse Teasely doing a Tai Chi video for our community to enjoy while in our homes, and I expect more to be coming for us, and Gary Sullivan will be making Yoga videos for us this coming week... all ways to incorporate the physical into our spiritual, and to do it together as a community. Thank you Master Teasely and Yogi G. As you can see we are all still continuing to bless one another despite circumstances, and our church still needs your support to continue to operate. We need both prayers and financial support (please continue send your offerings into our church office or make your donations online at our website [chcov.org](http://chcov.org))

Finally, I will also be rolling out a sermon series called “Dealing with Fear” starting next Sunday and it will span 3 Sundays where I have invited friends from around the world to join in the conversation through video chat. This is the big surprise I had alluded to earlier in the service. Grammy nominated sacred music composer Jai Uttal will be joining us from California, as well as singer and songwriter Sam Garrett from Europe. You may remember that we’ve sung several of their amazing songs in our worship services previously, and we are so fortunate to hear from them and even hear them share some of their music directly with us over video. Also, author and Christian activists Shane Claiborne and Larycia Hawkins will be joining the conversations we’ll be having over the next three weeks—and I imagine after it’s all said and done we’ll have a few more surprise visitors along the way. These are uniquely trying times for us as members of humanity, and we must dig deep into our souls to find hope, while at the same time we cannot simply stay holed up in the crevices of our homes, or the dark corners of our minds. We must follow God’s voice to the entrance of the cave; we must listen and look, and feel, and act—even when we are physically separated. In this way we stay together, in community, loving one another.

Shalom, peace to you all