

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the one who came to bring us peace, Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord, amen.

We live in a noisy world. Even outside of all city and village limits we still have jets that fly over our house in Union Township, near West Milton. At any given moment we might have two or even three television sets turned on and tuned to different channels. On Sunday afternoons our house is abuzz with children's voices, some a little too loud... It makes it hard to concentrate. Sometimes a moment of real peace and quiet is hard to come by. To be perfectly honest, I don't really enjoy peace and quiet. Even as a teenager in school, I always had to play the radio or have the TV on when I studied. For me, using my brain to compartmentalize and shut out the external noise actually helped me concentrate on my studies. It's still that way. When I'm studying for the Sermon each week, if I don't have some background noise my mind wanders and I can't concentrate on the task at hand, but as soon as I turn on the TV or play some music, I focus in, like a laser and that's when I finally can understand the word God wants me to preach.

As I read through the various commentaries about Elijah, quite a few of them pointed out that it appears Elijah was in a serious depression. He believed his ministry had been totally ineffective and that he was the last man standing up for the God of Israel. He shunned his friends and even left his servant and wandered off into the desert wilderness where he begged God to take his life. I'm not a

clinical Psychologist, so I won't tell you Elijah was depressed. That takes a professional's diagnosis. What I can tell you is that Elijah was sad. I know a thing or two about sadness. I think we've all experienced sadness from time to time. It's a pretty common thing to go through times when you just feel like you're in a funk. What do you do when the veil of darkness descends on your soul and you feel sad? Elijah ran away and begged to die...

These past many months have been hard for a lot of people. We're working from home a lot more than in the past. For me a lot of the meetings I used to attend regularly have been cancelled or moved to online webinars or Zoom Meetings. Zooming or online webinars or FaceBook Live are not the same as having direct face to face contact with friends and colleagues. This past almost two years have left me feeling isolated and alone. When we miss those we love and crave the human contact of our friends and associates, it can leave us sad and lonely. For most of the Pandemic I tried to drown out my sadness with noise. I almost always have the television on in the room. I've done a lot more reading and phone calling...

Elijah found himself alone in a cave wishing God would just take his life. He thought he was the only surviving prophet left, even though the Bible says God had reserved 7,000 righteous Israelites. That's what being alone can do to you. It distorts your perceptions of reality. Elijah could have rejoined his fellow

colleagues and countrymen any time, but he chose to remain isolated, in his cave, contemplating his own death. That's precisely the point at which Elijah encountered the living God once again in his life. He didn't find God in the noise of the tornado or the tremors of the earthquake. He didn't see God's awesome power in the heat of the fire. Instead, Elijah heard God's still small voice in the silence after all the commotion had ceased. When he did, that voice was enough to renew Elijah's zeal for his ministry. God recommissioned him to go forth and anoint the next Kings and even his replacement in the prophet Elisha.

What got Elijah in this funk to begin with? He faced grave persecution and death threats from King Ahab and Queen Jezebel because he was brave enough to speak truth to the powerful and they didn't like what he had to say. Ahab was the 7<sup>th</sup> King of Israel. Just 7 generations, about 140 years separated Ahab from Saul and look how far they had led Israel astray. If you recall from last week when we read from chapter 5 of First Kings, Solomon had developed a trading partnership with the King of Tyre. From that partnership we now find that Ahab has married Jezebel a daughter of one of their kings. To make matters worse Ahab had allowed Jezebel to bring the worship of her god, Baal, into the religious places in Israel. Earlier in First Kings it says King Ahab did more evil in the sight of the Lord than all the other kings combined. As you can imagine this didn't set well with YHWH, so he sent his prophet Elijah to bring God's Word to bear against Ahab and

Jezebel. At first Elijah was extremely successful. Remember the story where he ministered to a Widow of Sidon during the extreme draught and kept her and her son alive with miraculous oil and flour? Then he demonstrated God's power by consuming a bull offering with fire from heaven, even after the entire altar and surrounding area was completely drenched with water. After that he slew the 450 prophets of Baal. While Elijah was still riding high on all these recent successes, Jezebel countered with a threat of her own. She promised Elijah she would have him killed within the day.

I've never been threatened with death because of my ministry, but I have felt the sting of rejection. Who hasn't? It can leave you sad and maybe even depressed, certainly feeling alone. God never promised any of us the easy road. In fact, I believe Jesus said any who want to be his disciples must take up a cross and follow him. Now in all our lives there are many joys, but there are just as many valleys we must all go through as well. Some of us might use noise or other harmful distractions to help us get through the latest crisis. Other's turn to the silence and inner contemplation for the answers to our troubles. Some of us have learned to pray our way through times of trouble. I can't tell you what will work for you, but I can tell you this; God is present with you in all your highs and all your lows. I try to begin each Confirmation class by going around the room and asking each student to share a high and a low they have experienced since our

previous meeting. We then pray for each other asking God to help us in our low times and thanking God for his Holy Presence all the time. My hope is we are modeling a health way to navigate through life by helping and praying for one another.

We stand among a great cloud of witnesses who have already run the race we're all still running. May the witness of those who have gone before us, as well as those whom we serve alongside today, help and guide us in our times of sadness and despair. May God's Holy Spirit be with us all as we too carry the cross of Jesus into our world filled with Ahabs and Jezebels. May God's still small voice whisper to you, letting you know you are loved and you are most certainly not alone. Amen.