

“What are you doing here, Elijah?” (1 Kings 18:9). Elijah explains all that he has done for God. Some have called the book of Kings a “*Babylonian Times* bestseller” with its historical narrative of the history of Israel.<sup>1</sup> In the beginning of this chapter Jezebel sends word to Elijah that she will kill him for getting rid of all of her prophets—the prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel. Elijah runs away into the wilderness and prays for his own death. He fears his life is not worth saving. A messenger from God comes and basically gives him the strength to live. The messenger tells him to get up and eat and drink and points him to Horeb. Elijah goes into the cave at Horeb and spends the night. Horeb is place of Mount Sinai upon which Moses and God communicate.

It’s here that our story begins. The messenger from God comes and says, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” The messenger tells Elijah to go outside of the cave and stand on the mountain where God will pass by. We hear then the forces of nature.

*The Message* translation says: “A hurricane wind ripped through the mountains and shattered the rocks before God, but God wasn’t to be found in the wind; after the wind an earthquake, but God wasn’t in the earthquake; and after the

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<sup>1</sup> David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, eds., *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary, Year A, Volume 3* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 314.

earthquake fire, but God wasn't in the fire; and after the fire a gentle and quiet whisper." (1 Kings 19:11-12). *The King James Version* says what may be more familiar: "and after the fire a still small voice." In the *New Revised Standard Version* it reads: "and after the fire a sound of sheer silence."

How do we listen to the still small voice of God? How do we hear the sound of sheer silence or God's gentle and quiet whisper and be changed by it?

The messenger of God asks Elijah a second time: "What are you doing here, Elijah?" (1 Kings 19: 13). Elijah gives the same response. After he has encountered the still small voice of God, Elijah isn't changed by the experience. He gives the same complaint, and God takes away his prophetic ministry. God tells Elijah the succession plan for him and that his mantle will be passed to Elisha. Elijah held onto his fear *and* God didn't give up on Elijah. Elijah's humanness comes out with power in this story.

It's good to be back in your midst after a delightful and refreshing time at the beach. I was around water most of the time, and I find water to be spiritually nourishing—the sound of it, the sight of it, the joy it brings to children of all ages, the power of it, the vastness of it, the raging of it, the calm of it, the frolicking in it of dolphins seen on my early morning walks. For me the beach is one of those places to listen for the gentle and quiet whisper of God. There is time. There is rest. There is more intention and attention I can give. We all need time set apart for

refreshment and for quiet prayer to counter the wind, earthquake and fire of our lives. We need space to listen for the gentle and quiet whisper of God.

We left our little slice of heaven Saturday morning to the news of the tragedy in Charlottesville—one of my favorite cities in Virginia. It is hard to wrap my mind around the atrocity that has happened there—the hatred that turned to violence, a despicable display of racism that breaks my heart. When I arrived home late last night, I spent time looking at the online posts, videos of the loss of life and injuries, pictures of clergy standing together to counter the protesters—many Episcopal clergy living into their baptismal promises. Bishops and clergy from the Diocese of Virginia were there in good number praying and standing for justice. People of faith stood together to counter the protesters.

Charlottesville’s city manager passionately said, “Hate came to our town today in a way that we had feared but we had never really let ourselves imagine would.”<sup>2</sup> Ku Klux Klan members, neo-Nazis, and others marched carrying swastika flags, rallying because of Charlottesville’s decision to remove a statue of Robert E. Lee from a city park. A state of emergency was declared yesterday morning. A 32-year old woman was killed, 19 injured, 2 state police officers were killed when their helicopter crashed, a 20-year old has been arrested and charged with murder. Chaos erupted over hatred. It was reported that some went to the help

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<sup>2</sup> Joe Heim, Elle Silverman, T. Rees Shapiro and Emma Brown, “One Dead as Car Strikes Crowds Amid Protests of White Nationalist Gathering in Charlottesville; Two Police Die in Helicopter Crash,” in *The Washington Post*, August 12, 2017.

of others while some police officers stood by and did nothing. Others praised the response by Charlottesville and state police. Lives have been forever changed.

I watched video of an interfaith gathering of all sorts of people, singing spirituals while gathered in a church and then heading out to the streets to stand against the white supremacists who had carried torches of hatred. They were counter-protesters standing for justice and standing against hatred. They were singing songs of hope and freedom. In the wind and earthquake and fire, they were singing praises to God who sometimes speaks in the deafening sound of silence.

Martin Luther King, Jr. said, “Returning hate for hate multiplies hate, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate, only love can do that.”<sup>3</sup>

Elijah reminds us to listen for the still small voice of God in the midst of everyday life, even in the midst of chaos. Our prayers are important and needed for all affected by the violence hatred has brought to Charlottesville and all around our world. Only love can drive out hate, and I believe the events of Charlottesville call us not only to pray but also to listen for the still small voice of God within us. How can we better educate ourselves? How can we more deeply see the hatred around us and find the courage to speak up and stand for justice? God didn’t give up on Elijah and God doesn’t give up on us.

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<sup>3</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr. *Strength to Love*.