

God Understands in the Silence
Narrative Lectionary
November 5, 2017

1 Kings 19: 1-18

Russell Mitchell-Walker

In my high school years school, my brother who is 8 years older than I, lived at home in the bedroom beside me. I woke up one night to him screaming into the mirror of the bathroom, gripping onto the sink – he almost pulled it off the wall. He had been having some different experiences and conversations with himself and with me. Not much of it made sense and it culminated with this episode in the middle of the night. It turns out he was diagnosed with Hyper-Manic depression. It was not something I had ever heard of but we hear of manic depression more frequently today. The hyper part was high energy and a very active mind. It was quite the time, and although I did tell my friends about it, we didn't talk about it much. The stigma of mental illness continues to be a problem today that we need to address. It is important to get the support and help that we need when we experience it, which my brother has and he is doing well.

In reading and exploring the scripture reading today, it became evident that the prophet Elijah is depressed. He has done everything he had been called and asked to do. He has challenged the Baal worshipping Israelites, led by the corrupt king Ahab and his Baal worshipping wife Jezebel. Ahab has been influenced by Jezebel to make Baal the God of the kingdom and had all the prophets of God killed, with Elijah alone surviving. Elijah challenges them to a duel of miracles and brings fire upon a soaking wet altar, when the prophets of Baal are unable to conjure up a spark. The rains then came after a three year drought. Yet Ahab and Jezebel ordered Elijah to be killed, so he fled into the wilderness. He was overwhelmed with his plight after all he had done and yet still people did not change. He felt it would be better for him to be dead, and wishes for God to take his life. Losing the will to live is certainly a sign of depression.

Yet God does not judge him or blame him for these feelings. Elijah feels overwhelmed and God understands. It can challenge the cliché that God won't give us anymore than we can handle. First of all I don't believe God gives us the challenges. And if they are not given to us, then God doesn't control how much we experience or undergo. However, God is with us and understands. God lets Elijah do what he needs. Elijah sleeps, and an angel provides food for him, to

make sure he is getting the nourishment he needs and prepare him for the journey. God sends him on a journey of 40 days and nights to the mountain where Moses received the 10 commandments, possibly in the same cave. God tells Elijah to go out and stand on the mountain and wait for God to pass by. But Elijah stays in the cave in his despondent state. He experiences a strong wind, an earthquake and then fire, but he is not moved and God is not in any of these extreme occurrences. Then there is sheer silence, or a gentle whisper, a still small voice, depending on the translation of the Bible. God is in the silence and Elijah covers his face to go before God. And God gives him a task to do. Elijah is to go back and anoint new kings for both kingdoms of Judah and Israel, and anoint Elisha as a prophet to replace him when he dies. God gives Elijah purpose again. God reminds him that he is not alone that there are seven thousand Israelites who have remained faithful.

In Elijah's time of need, God did not come powerfully, but gently. God was with Elijah, and silently present, in a way that drew Elijah out. Our silent presence is sometimes what is needed for those suffering. We may know all too well that it is hard to know what to say or what might help. Sometimes it is the quiet presence that is needed. Elijah experienced God in the silence. This is also important for us to note. How often do we take time to be silent in our lives? To pray or listen in silence and be open to God's presence in that silence. Because our lives are so busy and full, it can be hard to find the time for this kind of practice, so I invite you to take a few moments now to be in silent and open to God's gentle whisper. I will lead you into the silence with a meditation and then provide a few minutes of just quiet. Then we will come out of the silence with a few words, the ringing of the prayer bowl and move into our hymn.

I invite you to begin by sitting upright in your chair, with your feet flat on the floor or reaching to the floor. Put down anything you may have in your hands and let them rest on your laps. Take some slow deep breaths into your belly, beginning a slow steady breath, paying attention to your breathing deep into your belly. As you breathe, quiet your mind. Let go of any thoughts that are occupying your mind and focus on your breathing. As you breathe, you may notice thoughts, things to do, plans for the day popping into your mind. Notice them and let them go, knowing you can come back to them if and when you need to. As you continue to breathe, move your attention to your heart space, the centre where you experience love and compassion. Open your heart space and breathe.

Know you are loved and lovable as you experience this centre. Now breathing deeply again move your awareness to your head, your centre of clarity and wisdom. Experience the quiet clarity of your mind as you breathe. Now bring your awareness to all three centres, head, heart and gut and bring them together, into alignment as you breathe, connected and aligned, integrated in sensation and being. Experience these moments of quiet, groundedness, openness, and clarity as we sit in silence.

Remember to breathe...

So with a body that is relaxed, healthy, and strong, full of vitality; with a heart open, flowing with compassion and joy, and with a mind quiet, alert, and clear, completely refreshed and renewed, wide awake, at the end of the ringing of the prayer bowl, when you are ready, open your eyes