

Grace and peace to you from God the Father, Son and Spirit. Amen.

LET US PRAY: LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, speak to us and let it be known to all that we are Your servants and that You are the LORD God. Preserve our hearts and lives in Your care always. Amen.

**God Silences Us
So His Still Small Voice Can Be Heard**

1. He is Heard in the Whisper of the Gospel
2. He is Heard among the Remnant who Believe

In the name Jesus our Savior, dear fellow redeemed,

The first question posed by the Lord in our text is “What are you doing here Elijah?” Before considering our text, just where was Elijah and what He was doing there. Elijah had wandered far south of Israel. He finds himself at Mount Sinai, the mountain of God, many days’ journey into the desert.

Elijah has fallen into utter despair. The land of Israel has become exceedingly wicked. A king named Ahab and his queen, Jezebel, held the throne. They had led the people of Israel into impenitence and idolatry. Even after God performs great wonders before the people, Ahab and Jezebel conspire to kill Elijah. He says, “It is enough! Now, LORD, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers.” We consider now this Elijah, a prophet of God, alone and fleeing for his life and the still small voice which visits him...

1 Kings 19:9–21 ⁹ And there he went into a cave, and spent the night in that place; and behold, the word of the Lord came to him, and He said to him, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” ¹⁰ So he said, “I have been very zealous for the Lord God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life.” ¹¹ Then He said, “Go out, and stand on the mountain before the Lord.” And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the 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. ¹³ So it was, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave. Suddenly a voice came to him, and said, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” ¹⁴ And he said, “I have been very zealous for the Lord God of hosts; because the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life.” ¹⁵ Then the Lord said to him: “Go, return on your way to the Wilderness of Damascus; and when you arrive, anoint Hazael as king over Syria. ¹⁶ Also you shall anoint Jehu the son of Nimshi as king over Israel.

And Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel Meholah you shall anoint as prophet in your place. ¹⁷ It shall be that whoever escapes the sword of Hazael, Jehu will kill; and whoever escapes the sword of Jehu, Elisha will kill. ¹⁸ Yet I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him.” ¹⁹ So he departed from there, and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he was with the twelfth. Then Elijah passed by him and threw his mantle on him. ²⁰ And he left the oxen and ran after Elijah, and said, “Please let me kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow you.” And he said to him, “Go back again, for what have I done to you?” ²¹ So Elisha turned back from him, and took a yoke of oxen and slaughtered them and boiled their flesh, using the oxen’s equipment, and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he arose and followed Elijah, and became his servant.

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

1. He is heard in the whisper of the Gospel

Have you ever had so much noise or confusion going on around you that you simply can’t think? Perhaps the kids keep screaming or a baby is crying. Perhaps the neighbors are having a party and their music is blasting so loud your windows are rattling. Or perhaps you just have so many thoughts in your head that you just can’t focus on the task right in front of you.

“Go out, and stand on the mountain before the LORD.” This was the same mountain where the ten commandments were given – Mt. Sinai. We stand there, in that same place where Moses stood face to face before the glory of God; there with Elijah we stand before the presence of God.

What sort of noise is going on in your life? Do you struggle to get anything accomplished? In our Gospel reading, Jesus lays before us an impossible task. He says in Luke 9, “No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.” How many times have we looked back? Just one glance back – to see what life would be like ... if I wasn’t married ... if I wasn’t in this job ... if God hadn’t allowed this crises in my life ... if I wasn’t a Christian. A yoke of oxen requires the utmost attention to keep in steady course. And the oxen of our flesh simply will not be bridled. We read in our epistle reading, “the flesh lusts against the spirit, so that you do not do the things you want to do.”

Your flesh and the world will ever raise its voice in disobedience. They tell you how life should be and who you should be. These voices war against the Spirit by rationalizing why its ok to practice sin – to lie, to continue in sexual sins, to live in a lifestyle that contradicts God’s good will.

So God asks the question: "Why are you here?" The rock is torn to pieces, the ground quakes beneath our feet, and the fire burns with the fury of hell. All this noise and commotion is meant to do what? To get our attention. To silence us before the glory and power of God. As Paul writes: *Romans 3:19 Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.*

But where is the LORD? Does He mean to leave us in silence and terror?

11 And behold, the Lord passed by, ... but the Lord was not in the wind; ... but the Lord was not in the earthquake; 12 ... but the Lord was not in the fire. and after the fire a still small voice.

Maybe you've witnessed a sudden tragedy that leaves you speechless. The tornadoes that rip whole communities to shreds, the fires which rage through households in a matter of minutes, the crisis which has left our life in pieces – these leave us silent. But the Lord was not in them. These silence us to the Lord can come in His still small voice. Literally, "after the fire, a gentle whisper." God whispers now to you in the voice of the gospel. When no one else would put their hand to the plow, God calls forth Jesus – the one who set His course for Jerusalem in silent obedience. He did not look back. He did not question what God had asked of Him. Jesus was truly alone, and they sought His life. Jesus put His hand to the plow in perfect love and finished the work He had been given when none of us could do it. He plowed through the labor of the Law, keeping the commandments for you. He suffered the fire of hell which we deserve so that through His death, we might be forgiven.

The psalmist David writes in Psalm 2, "why do the nations rage? Kings of the earth set themselves together against the Lord and against His anointed. He who sits in heaven shall laugh. "Yet I have set My King on my Holy Hill of Zion. You are My Son, today I have begotten You."

The world is so busy raging and shouting that it does not hear such a soft sound so freely given. God's Son has been crowned; over sin and death He rules as King. He breaths forth His Spirit in a whisper which we would never have heard if He had not grabbed our attention with the threat and power of the Law. *Isaiah 1:18 "Come now, and let us reason together," Says the Lord, "Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool.* Your flesh must now remain silent. "And those who are in Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires" (Galatians 5). Satan, the accuser, must remain silent. The accusations of the Law cannot speak against you. For God's work in Christ is irrevocable. Come out of the cave with Elijah and hear the still small voice of God which speaks in the Gospel.

2. He is heard among the remnant who believe

Elijah had labored fervently for the people of Israel. But where were the results? He could see no good that was being accomplished for all his zealous work. Elijah groans, "I alone remain, and they seek my life."

Similar to the state of Israel in Elijah's day, it seems the voices of the world are drowning out that small voice. This last week, if you've turned on the news or read the paper, you've likely heard the commotion. At the Supreme Court, they rejoice over federal legislation that officially approves of same sex marriage. In Texas they rejoice over a law which would have virtually outlawed abortions – not because it passed, but because it failed. They rejoice that innocent lives will continue to be legally taken. How long will it be before such persecution touches your life, your church, your family? Or maybe it already has.

God calls us to be silent once again. *Psalms 46:10 Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!*

In the midst of all this, God remains exalted and we give thanks. We rejoice that as we gather here and as Christians gather around the world we know there is yet a remnant. Let us not forget the promise of God: *Isaiah 55:10 "For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, And do not return there, But water the earth, And make it bring forth and bud, That it may give seed to the sower And bread to the eater, 11 So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.*

We rejoice that the still small voice is still being sounded and is being heard and believed. In every nation, in every denomination where the gospel is being proclaimed, there God is reserving those who do not bow the knee to sin. And even unto the end, no matter how bad things get for Christians, God's voice will continue to speak to us, to care for us, and to prosper us.

Romans 11:1-5 1 I say then, has God cast away His people? Certainly not! For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. 2 God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel, saying, 3 "Lord, they have killed Your prophets and torn down Your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life"? 4 But what does the divine response say to him? "I have reserved for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal." 5 Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace.

So God asks, "What are you doing here today?" The mission of the Church is not to make the most noise or to make the biggest display of power.

Martin Luther commented on this text saying: "This is adequate evidence that size does not make the church. Nor dare one consider how holy its origin is, who its ancestors are, and what they have in their possession and have received from God" (AE 2:101).

It is not the size that matters to God, but the substance. It is not the fact that you are physically here in the pews that matter to God, but that you are spiritually here. Church growth does not exist apart from the substance of God's truth and the gospel of Jesus Christ. The true growth is unseen, for God is preserving His remnant by faith. When Elijah thought he was all alone, God's voice whispers: *8 Yet I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him.*

So we are called to silence the shouts of all that would drown out God's still small voice. We unite in His voice of truth according to the grace which His Spirit supplies.

Let us not despair. Let us not look to the size of our congregation, but to the substance of what we believe and teach. May the world be silenced so that it can hear the small voice we proclaim.

God will take care of guiding the course of this world as He wills. "Whoever escapes the sword of Hazael, Jehu will kill; and whoever escapes the word of Jehu, Elisha will kill." God appointed these leaders not to turn the people back to faith, but because He would use them to carry out His plan against all who oppose the cause of His remnant and the promise to bring the world a Savior.

Do not expect the right politician or the right legislation to force this world into love for the truth. What this nation and this world needs more than the proper legislation is the proper voice to draw all people to the love of God which is in Christ Jesus. It is the substance of His still small voice in gospel and sacraments that alone works faith and love in our hearts. So He will always use these means to keep us in His care – and "the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it."

God heard the despair of Elijah and appointed another steadfast witness to give him help and eventually take up his ministry. Elisha was out farming like any other day. Who knows where you'll be when the Lord whispers to you. Who knows how the Lord might use you to aid this pastor in putting your hand to the plow. He asks, "what are you doing here?"

As we look forward to this Bible Seminar in July, we pray for this still small voice to be heard. We pray that the voices of Satan would be silenced, and the truth be echoed from the mountain top. We pray that God would bless the flyers being sent out so that just one more ear would hear the blessed whisper. So come out from your cave and stand before the presence of the Lord. He is here to strengthen and use you in His kingdom. We are not worthy for such a yoke – in fact it is impossible that we could keep the course. But according to the grace which God alone supplies, He promises to be with you. As you labor on, He speaks for you and through you – the still small voice of God. Amen.