7/17/16 1 Kings 19:9-13, **Listening for God: How do you hear God?**

We are only looking at one question today and it is one I want you to think about, how do you hear God in your life? Or maybe you prefer, how do you listen for God in your life? In a world where people purposefully take trucks and drive them into innocent crowds of people gathered for a good time, or take a gun and kill as many people as they can in a nightclub or in a school or sitting eating at outside cafes, amidst all that seems to be going wrong with the world, how do you hear God?

Or maybe you don’t believe in God? I take it from your attendance here this morning that you do believe there is a God. Or maybe you believe what were the popular words of a song a few years ago, “God is watching us, from a distance.” God doesn’t really want to get involved with us. God may have started the whole creation thing but is now just sitting back and watching it all unravel. God really wants no part in it anymore.

Or maybe you are like Elijah and believe God does hear us when we call and does want to be involved with our lives, in fact created us to be a part of God’s mission for the world. If so, how do you hear God? This is not just a rhetorical question for in a moment I will ask Mike to go around with the microphone for anyone who would like to answer. How do you listen for or hear God in your life. Would anyone like to share (open the floor for any responses)?

I ask this partly because of our scripture text this morning. Elijah felt his world had, “gone to pot” (so to speak). He felt that he and he alone was following God properly (whenever you start thinking you are the only person following God, know that that in and of itself is a warning sign you need to talk with God) and there were people trying to kill Elijah (Queen Jezebel to be exact). Instead of trusting God and standing his ground, Elijah runs to the hills and as our scripture text opens this morning we find him hiding in a cave calling out to God, waiting for God to answer.

And then the interesting insight into how we need to be listening for God. You see Elijah has talked many times with God and has done what we would consider some miraculous things for God so he knows what to listen for. He knows when he is hearing God. So when first the mighty winds blow, and whether you take this literally as hurricane force winds or as I sometimes take it living in the world of academia where we seem to have an abundance of mighty wind-blowers (if you get my drift), God was not in the mighty wind.

And then the earthquake and once again whether you take this as literally the earth shaking beneath your feet or when you find yourself in a situation where everything you thought was solid around you is crumbling before your eyes. I did a funeral service this week for a friend of mine whose mother passed away. Just over 30 days ago we had buried his father. In just over a month he and his siblings lost their mother and their father and some of the foundation of their lives is still shaking and reeling. You never know when the ground beneath you will begin to shake BUT, God was not in the earthquake.

And then fire, when you see thunderbolts as fire from the sky or fireballs raining down upon you or you find yourself in those hot spots in life, God was not in the fire. And Elijah knew. He didn’t move a muscle according to the text. It wasn’t the mighty wind or the ground shaking beneath him or fires all around him. Nope, he didn’t move a muscle until as different biblical texts translate the Hebrew, there was the sound of sheer silence, a still small voice, a gentle whisper.

And I want to make the point here that although we may cry out to God in the midst of life’s mighty winds and earth shaking events and in the midst of all the fires we feel we are constantly putting out in our life—God will answer us. I don’t know how it has been working in your life, but in my life I usually describe it as running into a brick wall. God doesn’t usually use wind, earthquake or fire in my life, it’s the old brick wall that usually stops me dead in my tracks and finally I seek God’s guidance for where I’m going.

You see, if you want to be *prepared* for life’s mighty winds, earthquakes, fires, and not have to run into a brick walls like I do, we need to spend that quiet time with God for God to fill us and prepare us. And I emphasize the point here that if God speaks to us in sheer silence, in a still small voice, or a gentle whisper, it’s awful hard to hear God if all you have going on in your life is mighty wind blowing ground shaking activities and your putting out fires all of the time!

Jesus knew. If you look at Jesus’ life as it is found in the Gospel texts you will see over and over again he got away from the crowds, even got away from the disciples to go off by himself, to find that quiet spot to be in communication with God, to talk and listen to God, to be prepared for the day’s events. Even the last night of his life in the Garden, we read he moved away from the disciples to do his final preparation, to listen and hear God’s voice clearly in a quieter spot.

You need to find what works best for your lifestyle. Thank you to everyone who shared this morning as you’ve heard the various techniques that people use. My techniques have developed over the years as I’ve gotten tired of running into brick walls. I have a prayer chair at home I use in the mornings to both pray and to journal. I’m what you call an “out-loud” processor so I need to write down what I’m thinking a feeling and then I get to go over it and then I often see “O, is that what God’s been saying”.

Sometimes I hear God speak to me in my devotional reading and Bible Study. I also belong to a Spiritual Direction Group which gathers each month as we talk about how we have seen God moving in our lives this past month and lift each person in prayer and then share what we hear God saying for each person. I know some folk have a Spiritual Director to help them hear God better in their lives. What works best for you? Have you ever experimented with it?

Marcia and I have had some fun taking you through our sermon series, *Not the Leader You Expected: A series about the unlikely people God uses.* I understand some of you that were here last week picked the dictator as your next leader instead of Jesus? God uses many different types of people with many different skills, gifts and talents. As God told Samuel, we humans tend to look at the outward appearances, but God knows the person’s heart.

Starting tomorrow the political conventions begin and we will officially have two choices and their running mates for the president of the United States as well as people running for the open elected positions in our area. Are you making it a matter of prayer? Are you listening for God’s voice in the midst of all the hoopla and MIGHTY wind that will be blowing around?

It is only a matter of time before the search committee brings a name before you of the person they have felt led by God to call as your next pastor. If they are bringing a name, it means that person has also felt led by God to be your next pastor. Up until that point we have been holding the search committee in prayer as they listen to all the candidates for God to guide them, but once they bring a candidate before you, their job is almost over for now the decision will shift into your hands and your heart. It will be time for you to be listening for God to confirm the candidate as your next pastor at First Baptist Church. Are you preparing for that moment? Are you ready?

It only seems apropos to bring this sermon to and end by talking and listening to God. Let us go to the Lord in prayer being ready to listen and hear God for our search committee and our next pastor, and our tower committee, and our political races including our next president, and for the joys and concerns we each bring. What joys and concerns do you have today to bring to God in prayer…..AMEN