

Poor Elijah.

Elijah came to a cave, and spent the night there. Then the word of the LORD came to him, saying, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” “I have been very zealous for the LORD, and they are seeking my life, to take it away.”

The Israelites he was sent to help have forsaken God’s covenant, thrown down God’s altars, and killed God’s prophets with impunity! Elijah’s done what he’s been asked. Why isn’t everyone reacting like he’s a hero? He feels like a failure—and he’s had enough.

I think we all can understand that. I’m sure at some point or other in our lives we’ve tried our best to do the right thing, only to have it all blow up in our faces. Or we thought we were walking down the road that was right for us and discover that we’ve derailed, or there are roadblocks everywhere.

Then Elijah is told to go up on the mountain because he is to stand before God.

Now – if you are thinking, “Wow! “ let me tell you what happened.

First, there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces.

Imagine that! Wind like a hurricane making huge pieces of rock weighing roughly the amount of a grown elephant come crashing down all around you.

Wow.

But God wasn’t in the wind.

Then there is an earthquake. I don’t know about you, but years ago I lived through a very mild earthquake here in Maine– and it sounded like trains were headed toward me. Felt like it too.

I think we've gone from Wow to YIKES.

But God wasn't in the earthquake either. I'm sure that made Elijah feel a little safer. Not. Because: earthquake!

And then there was fire. Not a campfire—but FIRE!!! And I think all of us are joining Elijah in saying, "Maybe I'll just take a raincheck on meeting face to face with God."

But God isn't in the fire.

Then—there is huge, sheer, silence. Imagine that. Listen to the sounds around you right now. Even if they're as faint as the motor on your refrigerator, as loud as a truck, or as lovely as the sound of water flowing outside—there are always sounds.

This God silence enveloped all else. And Elijah finally came out of the cave—eyes wide.

Where have you encountered God?

Often we encounter God in what we hear. But sometimes God is in what isn't said. In the emptiness of nothingness. In the Void.

Sometimes we encounter God in impossible places—doing impossible things. Maybe we don't find God when we are being buffeted from all sides by the winds of change, quaking with fright or burning like fire—but we do when life throws so much at us that we are feeling like we are drowning.

Like Peter.

Jesus—God--- asks Peter to do the thing he's the most scared of: to step out with him onto the water. He probably can't swim. And that's all he can think of at the moment. Well—that and: this is impossible.

Can't God just *calm our storms*, rather than asking us to step out onto the dangerous water and walk on top of it?

Because we can see the end story to that scenario: we're gonna drown—unable to draw a breath, much less swim or climb over the waves.

Don't we sometimes feel God's expectations are unrealistic?

Wanting Elijah to forget his fear and enter the political fray.

Wanting Peter to find the courage to walk into his discomfort and fear and stay afloat. Impossible.

And there you have it. God is always wanting the impossible from us.

But as I was reminded by a former parishioner the other day, every great achievement was once considered impossible.

Following where God leads us may mean suppressing our tendency to want a comfortable, safe daily routine, and forcing ourselves to engage physically and emotionally with the messiness of humanity, like Elijah.

Following God might mean stepping out boldly into the waters of change, like Peter.

And when we think that following God is too risky, that we can't go on—that's exactly when we need to tiptoe out of the cave or step out of the boat.

Because God IS NOT the winds that batter us. God IS NOT the earthquakes of life that shake us, and God is certainly NOT the fire that burns or the water that drowns.

But God is with us as we encounter these things.

God is there giving us the strength of silence, the silence of strength. God is reaching out a hand to steady and encourage us. And challenge us. And believe in us. As we step beyond our fears.

Amen.