

## **Thin Places: 2. Deal with the Noise**

**1 Kings 19:9-13**

**February 13, 2022**

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...17, 18, 19, 20. If you worshipped with us last week, you know that was our assignment: take 20 seconds, at points, throughout your day as an exercise in being still. In Psalm 46:10, God says, "Be still and know that I am God." This is a series about being still and knowing - finding the "thin places". It is an old Celtic concept adopted by the early Christians in Ireland. The thin places are those places where we know that we are in the presence of God. It could be a specific location where you looked at the natural beauty of the landscape, and you knew. Or it was when you held a newborn baby in your arms, and you knew. Or it was in the midst of something happening, and in that moment, you experienced something that no one else did. It was personal and profound, and you knew: there is a God, and that God is right here with you.

One of my thin place experiences happened right here in this sanctuary. I got to church extra early that morning and when I walked into the sanctuary. As the sun shone through our stained glass windows, I saw a prism of light washing over this sanctuary and I knew without a doubt that I was in the presence of God. And the words I heard, "Be still and know that I am God." I just stood there and soaked that in. That veil between heaven and earth was lifted, and I caught a glimpse of God's glory in this thin place. Today we're going to talk about how we find the space and the margin and the quiet we need to stop running to allow the silence to break through the noise and the stress and the worry and experience the presence of God.

Many years ago, Jerry and I participated in a spiritual retreat weekend. We were sponsored/invited by some of our very good friends, Jim and Dawn. But they provided us very little information about the retreat ahead of time. It was meant to be a surprise! We were told that the retreat began on a Thursday night and would last until dinner time on Sunday. Jim and Dawn planned to pick us up at 5p on Thursday and take us out to eat prior to delivering us to the retreat location. What we did not know ahead of time was that during dinner, they would ask us for our cell phones and watches. What? "How will we know when it's time to go to bed or get up? How will we know when to it's time to eat?" Don't worry. Your every need will be provided for. Well, it was a good thing that we trusted Jim and Dawn, or we might not have ever agreed to go. And for the next three days, we experienced an escape from the noise of the world that most of us had never known. And in the silence of that weekend, we heard something that we otherwise might have missed.

Most mornings, I wake up to the sound of my alarm. Our dog, Jack, gently whining, reminding me that he's ready to eat. The coffee maker beeps, the toaster dings, and my laptop announces the arrival of emails that came in overnight. All day long we are bombarded by sounds – sirens, shouts, road noise; advertisers using sound bites to get our attention. We even use noise to block out noise. On some Sunday afternoons, Jerry likes to watch golf or football and I like to read but I want to be with him. So, sit down on the end of the couch, put in my airbuds and listen to white noise so I can cancel out the noise of the TV.

And it's not just the noise, it's all the activity. Being in a hurry has become a way of life. Think back to the spring of 2020. We were not in a hurry to get anywhere. We had no where to go. In hindsight, that might not have been so bad after all. But as soon as we could fill our schedules. And some of us feel like we live in our cars. It's all about getting where we need to go as quickly as we can so we can get to the next thing on our schedule. Even at night when our head finally hits the pillow, we can't sleep. Our mind is still moving at the pace we've been

running. One of my podcasts reminded me this past week that even Jesus need space to breathe, be still and listen. We want that, don't we? Something is not right when there's no room, no space in life, running in a hundred different directions while telling yourself that you have no choice. We say that's just how life is. But if life has no room, it's a problem. It's not what God wants for us. It's not good for your relationships – in fact, we hardly know each other anymore, because there's no time to know each other. It's not good for your physical health – all this rushing around you'd think we would be healthier, but we're not. And it's not good for our souls. We need space. We need margin. We need to be still.

Today's scripture is about a man on the run, a man who was doing everything he thought God wanted him to do and yet it wasn't working for him. He could not see what God was doing. He could not hear what God was saying. This man was Elijah. It was the 9<sup>th</sup> century B.C., and Ahab was the king over the northern kingdom of Israel. Ahab was nominally religious and when he married a Phoenician princess, Jezebel, he was easily swayed to follow her religious leanings as a follower of Baal. But this displeased God, who sent his messenger Elijah to warn Ahab that there would be years without rain because Ahab had done what was evil in the sight of God. In response, Jezebel ordered that all the prophets of God be killed. And as a famine took hold in the land, God sent Elijah into the desert where Elijah was sustained miraculously by a brook of water and ravens that brought him food. But when the famine widened, the brook dried up, the ravens stopped bringing food, and Elijah ended up at the home of the widow at Zarapheth. Although she did not have enough food for herself and her son, somehow miraculously, once Elijah arrived, her food never ran out. And when her son died, Elijah prayed to God and somehow miraculously the woman's son came back to life. Elijah didn't recognize it, but we do! God was with him.

After three years of famine, Elijah returned to King Ahab to announce the end of the drought. But Ahab blamed Elijah for the drought. So, Elijah proposed a challenge, a test between the power of Baal and the power of God. The 450 prophets of Baal against Elijah, the one remaining prophet of God. So, they went to the top of Mount Carmel where two altars were built, one for Baal and one for God. Wood was laid on the altars. Two oxen were slaughtered and cut into pieces and the pieces were laid on the wood. Elijah then invited the priests of Baal to pray for fire to light the sacrifice. All 450 of them prayed from morning to night without success. Then Elijah ordered the altar of God to be drenched with water, not just once but three times. And when he asked God to accept the sacrifice, fire fell from the sky consuming the water, the sacrifice, and the altar. And then as Elijah continued to pray, the rain began to fall, ending the drought and saving the people.

But this enraged Jezebel and she vowed to kill Elijah. And in one of the greatest understatements of the Bible, we are told: **Elijah was afraid and ran for his life.** He ran into the desert, hid under a bush and said to God, "I quit. I don't want to do this anymore. Just let me die." But God didn't give up on Elijah, once again miraculously providing him with food and water. And what did Elijah do? He kept running.

And I wonder if that's not why we keep running. Because of fear. Maybe not fear for our lives, but it's still fear. Maybe we have a bad case of FOMO, the Fear of Missing Out. So, we keep adding more to our schedules. When our kids were younger, if I told them, "No, you can't go to that practice or game on Sunday morning. We go to church on Sunday mornings," I was afraid that they'd be overlooked or penalized by their coaches and sometimes, more often than I care to admit, we gave in. Or, maybe we're afraid of falling behind everybody else. If you told your boss that you can't work on a Saturday because you can't miss my kid's hockey tournament – you might be passed over for that promotion. Or maybe we're afraid of not mattering. I've had

this conversation a few times in the last two years with persons who suddenly lost their jobs through no fault of their own. Perhaps it was a residual effect because of COVID, a downsizing of the company but this came after giving years and years of loyalty to their employer. Initially, they had leads on new jobs that have now dried up. And what followed was this conversation about what their years of work and loyalty were they really all about. What have I been giving my life to and what for? All this running and for what? Fear. Fear drives us. So, we keep running.

And Elijah kept running all the way to Mount Horeb. (Interestingly, Mt. Horeb is also known as Mt Sinai, which is where Moses met God in the burning bush and where God gave Moses the 10 Commandments and later where Jesus would take Peter, James and John as he was transfigured, and they heard the voice of God say, "this is my Son with whom I am well pleased." This was holy space.) And Elijah ran and hid in a cave. What he didn't know was that he has come to his thin place. He was in the desert. He was all alone. And he stopped running. ***The LORD's word came to him and said, "Why are you here, Elijah?" Elijah replied, "I've been very passionate for the LORD God of heavenly forces because the Israelites have abandoned your covenant. They have torn down your altars, and they have murdered your prophets with the sword. I'm the only one left, and now they want to take my life too!"***

In other words, "Why am I here? Uhhh, hello! Are you paying attention at all? They're trying to kill me! Lord, look, I've done everything you've asked and all it brought me is more trouble. That's why I'm running." But I think God is saying, you are running because you're not listening. We like to think we are good at multitasking. I can listen to God while I'm driving the car, or I can listen to God while I'm doing other things. But that doesn't even work well with human interactions. Have you ever been in one of those conversations where someone is talking to you, but you find that you've stopped listening because you're thinking about how you are going to respond? Your mind is racing ahead. And God said to Elijah, you're not listening because you're running. ***The LORD said, "Go out and stand at the mountain before the LORD.***

#### ***The LORD is passing by.***

Go, stand on the mountain, and wait for me. Suddenly, there is a powerful wind – could this be the thin place? No, God is not in the wind. Then there is an earthquake – could this be the thin place? No, God is not in the earthquake. After the earthquake, there is a fire, but God is not in the fire either. ***After the fire, there was a sound. Thin. Quiet.*** God is not in the sound. God is in the silence. The Hebrew here is "sound of silence". It is in the silence that Elijah realizes that God is in all that has happened and all that will happen. Elijah, will you trust me? Have you been to that place, where you could hear the sound of silence? Elijah had to stop running for the silence to break through the noise and the stress and the worry. God is in the silence. Will you trust me?

Just over a year ago when Steve shared with our leadership team that he was planning to retire, I began wondering, what is next for me? What will the next chapter of my life and my ministry look like? Was I being called to stay at Messiah Church or was I being called to something new? So I took a 4 day retreat to northern Minnesota, to a hermitage, deep in the woods, to be alone, escape the noise, to pray, read scripture, immerse myself in nature and listen. It took me a couple of days to just get the noise in my head to stop but as it did, and as I read stories about people in the Bible who were called to do things and go places that they had never dreamed of going or doing, I began to hear God saying to me, "Tami, I will be with you. Do you trust me?" And I think that's what Elijah heard. In the sound of silence – Will you trust me? We don't hear that until we stop running and stop listening to the noise.

In Matthew 6:31, Jesus says: ***Therefore, don't worry and say, 'What are we going to eat?' or 'What are we going to drink?' or 'What are we going to wear?*** Stop running. Stop

running. **Gentiles long for all these things.** The gentiles are the ones who do not even believe in God (or they believe in other gods) and the gentiles are running. But.. **Your heavenly Father knows that you need them.** You heavenly Father knows what you need to eat, that you need to send your kids to college, that you need a relationship, that you need a job, or better health or a better marriage. Your heavenly Father knows. Elijah, your heavenly Father knows.

What would happen if you woke up every morning and instead of running the moment your feet hit the floor – instead of fear, there was trust. It's there in the sound of silence – a God who says, "you can trust me."

One of the things our grandsons love the most are overnights at Nana and Bapa's house. We live just 7 doors down the street, but they still love having sleepovers at our house. But when, Oliver, our 7-year-old, sleeps over, as bedtime starts to draw near, he's starts with this line of questioning, "where are you going to be when I go to bed." To which we always reply, "Right here on the couch or in our bed, Oliver." "But what if you're not there?" "We will be." "But what if you're not?" "We will be. We promise." And then, after we've snuggled into bed, read stories, and said our prayers, we go through this round of questions one more time. And then, in the silence, we gently rub his back until he knows that he is safe and loved and falls asleep. What he doesn't know but God knows, is that Oliver is learning to trust. It's there in the sound of silence, a God who says, "you can trust me."

**Let's pray:** God, we confess that we do not always understand Your ways. We are easily discouraged when life takes unexpected turns and our carefully laid plans and dreams come to nothing. We confess that we are quick to give up when things get difficult, and quick to question Your presence and Your power. Forgive us. Grant us patience to be still and wait for Your good timing. Open our eyes to recognize Your leading in our lives—to listen for the sound of silence when we least expect it. And then give us courage to trust you, even when we cannot yet see the outcome. We praise You for Your faithful love and pray that You would make us worthy to bear Your name. Amen.

### **Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of February 13, 2022**

**Weekly Prayer:** Merciful God, grant us the grace of your presence. We need to be reminded that we are not alone. We long to feel your Spirit and to hear your still, small voice whisper in our ears. Feed us with the spiritual food which only you can give, because you alone can satisfy the deepest needs of the soul. Amen.

#### **Monday, February 14**

##### **Scripture: Luke 22:39-44**

Jesus left and made his way to the Mount of Olives, as was his custom, and the disciples followed him. When he arrived, he said to them, "Pray that you won't give in to temptation." He withdrew from them about a stone's throw, knelt down, and prayed. He said, "Father, if it's your will, take this cup of suffering away from me. However, not my will but your will must be done." Then a heavenly angel appeared to him and strengthened him. He was in anguish and prayed even more earnestly. His sweat became like drops of blood falling on the ground.

**Observation:** What word or phrase speaks to you from this reading? This is the final night of Jesus' earthly life. He eats the Passover meal with his disciples, a meal that becomes the Last Supper and our model for Holy Communion. He announces the coming betrayal and denial by his disciples. Then, in today's reading, Jesus goes to the Mount of Olives to pray.

**Application:** Jesus went “as usual.” Jesus not only took this particular time to be alone and quiet with God, he apparently made it part of his routine. In any relationship, we discover the importance of regular communication. How can a routine of prayer strengthen your relationship with God? Jesus clearly had a specific place – a “thin place” – for prayer. Do you?

**Prayer:** I come to you, most gracious and merciful God, trusting not in my own abilities but trusting you and seeking your guidance. Help me to be faithful to you and all you desire for me. Amen.

## Tuesday, February 15

### Scripture: Isaiah 30:15, 18

Therefore, the LORD God, the holy one of Israel, says: In return and rest you will be saved; quietness and trust will be your strength—but you refused.

Nonetheless, the LORD is waiting to be merciful to you, and will rise up to show you compassion. The LORD is a God of justice; happy are all who wait for him.

**Observation:** What word or phrase speaks to you from this reading? The people would not listen to the words of prophets like Isaiah, but wanted to hear only comfortable words. They placed their trust everywhere but in God. Isaiah was very clear about what God demands. It is “repentance and rest,” “quietness and trust,” but the people chose their own ways which would ultimately lead to their destruction. Verse 18 provides a hopeful message: Isaiah announced that the Lord is also a God of mercy, compassion and justice.

**Application:** Repentance is turning to God. Rest is being still so that you can be available to God. Without repentance and rest, we miss out on what God can do in us. How are these four words – repentance, rest, quietness and trust – present in your life? When they have been present, how has life been different?

**Prayer:** Loving God, thank you that you are always reaching out, always wanting what is best for me. Help me to take the time to listen and learn from you, so that I am able to serve you fully in this world. Amen.

## Wednesday, February 16

### Scripture: Matthew 4:1-10

Then the Spirit led Jesus up into the wilderness so that the devil might tempt him. After Jesus had fasted for forty days and forty nights, he was starving. The tempter came to him and said, “Since you are God’s Son, command these stones to become bread.” Jesus replied, “It’s written, *People won’t live only by bread, but by every word spoken by God.*” After that the devil brought him into the holy city and stood him at the highest point of the temple. He said to him, “Since you are God’s Son, throw yourself down; for it is written, *I will command my angels concerning you, and they will take you up in their hands so that you won’t hit your foot on a stone.*” Jesus replied, “Again it’s written, *Don’t test the Lord your God.*” Then the devil brought him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. He said, “I’ll give you all these if you bow down and worship me.” Jesus responded, “Go away, Satan, because it’s written, *You will worship the Lord your God and serve only him.*”

**Observation:** What word or phrase speaks to you from this reading? Immediately following his baptism which was his “thin place” experience (where Jesus experienced the presence of God), Jesus entered the wilderness (desert) for 40 days. He would not accomplish his mission by using his supernatural power for his own needs, by using his power to win a large following by miracles, or by compromising with Satan. He met all three temptations with scripture.

**Application:** Jesus was sent out into the desert by the Holy Spirit, entering God’s training program, fighting off the temptations, and ultimately preparing himself for the battle he would face in the Garden of Gethsemane. How have past challenges prepared you for another time in life? Today is training for tomorrow. How are you allowing God to prepare you?

**Prayer:** In Jesus, you have shown us, O God, how you provide the strength to come through the challenges of life. Help me to lean on your message of scripture and know that even in my desert experiences, you are with me. Amen.

## Thursday, February 17

### Scripture: Matthew 6:5-13

“When you pray, don’t be like hypocrites. They love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners so that people will see them. I assure you, that’s the only reward they’ll get. But when you pray, go to your room, shut the door, and pray to your Father who is present in that secret place. Your Father who sees what you do in secret will reward you.

“When you pray, don’t pour out a flood of empty words, as the Gentiles do. They think that by saying many words they’ll be heard. Don’t be like them, because your Father knows what you need before you ask. Pray like this:

Our Father who is in heaven,  
uphold the holiness of your name.

Bring in your kingdom  
so that your will is done on earth as it’s done in heaven.

Give us the bread we need for today.

Forgive us for the ways we have wronged you,  
just as we also forgive those who have wronged us.

And don’t lead us into temptation,  
but rescue us from the evil one.

**Observation:** What word or phrase speaks to you from this reading? The Greek word that is used here for reward means to give back or pay back. The reward of praying in a specific location is not that we get what we want, but there is a reward! The God who sees you in secret, who sees you making time – the God of the universe will reward you.

**Application:** Have you discovered the reward? Paul describes this reward in Philippians 4:6 – *Do not be anxious about anything but with prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.* When and where do you have regular conversations with God?

**Prayer:** Lord, I so want the peace that you offer, a peace that is possible even in the midst of life’s greatest storms. I believe you want that for me as well. Help me to set aside the time and the place to meet with you, not so that I can get what I want, but so I can become what you want for me. Amen.

## **Friday, February 18**

### **Scripture: Hebrews 4:9-10**

So you see that a sabbath rest is left open for God's people. The one who entered God's rest also rested from his works, just as God rested from his own.

**Observation:** What word or phrase speaks to you from this reading? Throughout Hebrews one of the author's repeated concerns is that we might miss or avoid God's purpose for our lives and in so doing fall into apostasy - either by things done or left undone. Those who respond faithfully to God's promise will find the gift of rest making them fully alive to life. We have been invited to participate in God's Sabbath-rest.

**Application:** Our modern values seem to make us believe that every moment of the day must be productive, that I must have something to show for my time. Yet, the biblical wisdom says, "Don't just do something, stand there and rest!" We have Sunday, but is it truly the rest into which God invites us?

**Prayer:** Lord God, in your gift of creation, you promised a day of rest. As Augustine once said, "our hearts are restless until they can find rest in you." Help me to claim a time of Sabbath-rest, to let go of schedules and doing so that you can do in me what only you can do. Amen.

## **Saturday, February 19**

### **Scripture: Psalm 1**

The truly happy person

doesn't follow wicked advice,  
doesn't stand on the road of sinners,  
and doesn't sit with the disrespectful.

Instead of doing those things,

these persons love the LORD's Instruction,  
and they recite God's Instruction day and night!

They are like a tree replanted by streams of water,  
which bears fruit at just the right time  
and whose leaves don't fade.

Whatever they do succeeds.

That's not true for the wicked!

They are like dust that the wind blows away.

And that's why the wicked will have no standing in the court of justice—  
neither will sinners

in the assembly of the righteous.

The LORD is intimately acquainted  
with the way of the righteous,  
but the way of the wicked is destroyed.

**Observation:** What word or phrase speaks to you from this reading? This psalm paints a vivid and appealing picture of the results of meditation in our lives, explaining that the man or woman who meditates on the Word of God day and night will thrive and flourish like a tree full of life. Because the tree is planted by the water's edge, it prospers. Those who are planted in the life that God offers will flourish.

**Application:** Verse 3 indicates that we could “prosper” when planted and feeding on God’s Word. What do you think the writer means by “prosper”? Have those around you prospered from the attention you give to your spiritual growth?

**Prayer:** Lord, you are a patient God, waiting for me to receive what you want me to have. Help me to spend time with you – to find time in this day to break from the needs and demands at hand and to stand still. Help me to hear your still small voice and know that you are with me. Amen.