

First Sunday After Christmas
December 26, 2021
1 Kings 19:9-13

Christmas In a Gentle Whisper

And the word of the LORD came to him: "What are you doing here, Elijah?" He replied, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too." The LORD said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by." Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave. Then a voice said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" (1 Kings 19:9-13)

One night after our Wednesday Advent services a few years ago, I went home and turned on the television. It was a sitcom. I don't remember which one. But a boss was reprimanding one of his employees for putting up Christmas decorations in the office. He explained, "This is a government building. You cannot mix religion and government by putting up Christmas decorations." The employee replied, "But what does Christmas have to do with religion?" It's funny...and it's sad...and it's true. For much of the world, Christmas has nothing to do with religion.

Another cartoon I saw depicted a large store front window full of Christmas decorations. There were wrapped presents and a tree and Santa and his reindeer and candy canes and evergreens and mistletoe and all the usual Christmas stuff. In the corner was a small manger scene. Two ladies were standing in front of the window one was pointing at the manger. The caption read, "Would you look at that! Now even the church is trying to horn in on Christmas."

It is no great revelation that for the past month, much of the world has been celebrating Christmas while missing out on the main event. It is easy for us to point fingers at the world and say, much like the lady in the store window, "Would you look at that." It is too easy. So instead of doing that today let's take a few minutes to look at ourselves and make sure we didn't get distracted by the big show and miss out on anything God had in store for us. Now that the big show part of Christmas is over, it is a good time to reflect and make sure we caught it all.

And to help us do that, let's look at the Old Testament prophet Elijah. It was a hectic and busy time in Elijah's life. A woman named Jezebel had been trying to kill off all the prophets and she was hot on Elijah's tail. Trying to keep from being killed can keep a guy a little busy...make his life a little hectic. And into this busyness and this hecticness, God announced that He was about to make an appearance. So Elijah went out to the mountain to wait for God's appearance.

Well, he didn't have to wait long. Pretty soon the whole mountain was astir with a great whirlwind. Now I know that the wind can blow pretty strong in Minnesota. But not like this. The wind was blowing so hard that the mountain began to fall apart and the rocks were shattering all around Elijah.

The Bible doesn't tell us, but you can imagine what Elijah must have been thinking, "Here comes God. Yea, this is the way God should come. He's coming as a whirlwind and He's going to sweep away all my enemies and all my problems. And then everything will be right again. This will be the end of Jezebel and her false prophets. God's coming in the whirlwind." If that is what Elijah thought, he was wrong, God wasn't in the whirlwind.

Well, no sooner had the whirlwind stopped, than something else happened. There was a great earthquake. The whole mountain began to shake. Again, he must have thought to himself, "This is it. Here comes God and He's coming as an earthquake, just like He did for Moses at Mt. Sinai when He gave the Ten Commandments. This will shake them up all right. God's coming as an earthquake and He's going to shake up ol' Jezebel and her false prophets and then finally, they will leave me alone and things will settle down for me. Yea, this is the way God should come, in an earthquake." But if he was looking for God in the earthquake, he was wrong again. God wasn't in the earthquake.

You can imagine that at this point he must have been getting kind of disappointed. Well after the earthquake happened, he got another surprise. A great roaring fire came upon the mountain. Everything around him was burning up. And he surely must have thought to himself something like, "This has got to be it. God's coming in the fire. A fire, that's how he led the Israelites out of Egypt, and now He's coming again as a fire and He's going to purge the land of all His enemies. Now Jezebel will get what's coming to her. God's coming as a fire and He's going to consume Jezebel and the prophets of Baal..." Elijah was surely getting

excited. But...if he was looking for God in the fire, he was wrong again. God wasn't in the fire.

We can picture Elijah now sitting in a cave on the mountain feeling down again. He had looked for God in the whirlwind, but He wasn't there. He had looked for God in the earthquake, but He wasn't there. He had looked for God in the fire but he wasn't there. What was wrong?

Well, he didn't have much time to think about it. As he sat there in the cave, something else happened. Right outside the cave, he began to hear a gentle whisper. A gentle whisper. And this time he pulled his cloak up over his face and he went to the mouth of the cave, because he knew beyond all doubt that this time he was in the presence of the Almighty God. You see, God was in the gentle whisper. Not the whirlwind, or the earthquake, or the fire, but in a gentle whisper, a gentle whisper that let him know that God was there.

Sometime around thanksgiving, a busy, hectic season started for us. Then about four weeks ago, the first Sunday of Advent, God announced that in the midst of the busyness and hecticness, He was about to make a most special appearance.

Then immediately there was a whirlwind—a whirlwind of activity. Shopping and decorating and planning and cooking and cleaning. A whirlwind that stirred the whole community, even the whole world. And if you were looking for God in the whirlwind, you missed Him.

Then there came a great fire -- great fire of lights. Lights on houses, on trees on lampposts all over town, in strings and by themselves, white, colored, blinking, bubbling. The lights lit up the town and the house like a fire. A fire of lights. And if you were looking for God in the fire, you missed him.

Then was on earthquake—an earthquake of presents. Presents wrapped and piled overflowing and tumbling under the tree. An earthquake of presents that clogged up the mail and the delivery services. And if you were looking for God in the earthquake, you missed Him.

For God came and Christmas happened in a gentle whisper. A gentle whisper that said, *"Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord."* A quiet hillside in a dark little town called Bethlehem. No grand entrance. No big fanfare. No parade. No party. Just a simple stable and manger bed with an audience of a young couple, shepherds and whatever animals were there. That was the

main event. That was brought about the big show. Then the angels got busy and things got loud. Then the whirlwind of God's program of salvation found its voice. Then the earthquake of God's love was made personal for us. Then it was made possible for the fire of God's light to burn in places that it had never burned before. And it all started with God coming in a gentle whisper.

The purpose of the sermon is two-fold. One: we all need to take a minute now that the Big Show is over to contemplate the Main Event and make sure we heard the Gentle Whisper and all that it has to say to us. It reminds us that we need a Savior. There is no one in this room who does not need a Savior. Everyone here was born in sin and has continued in sin. And yet we have a God who loves each and every one of us so much that He became human at Christmas to save us. Spend some time now contemplating that glorious fact and all that means to you.

And second: God comes whenever we need Him, and He comes in a gentle whisper. Oh, He has shouted in the past. From the cross He shouted loud enough for all the world and underworld to hear, "IT IS FINISHED!" And He will shout again. When Christ returns it will be with a shout. The Bible tells us that the Lord will come with a trumpet blast and a shout that will literally raise the dead. But for now, most often, He comes with a gentle whisper.

Just because it is a whisper that doesn't mean it is hard to hear. Just because it is gentle doesn't mean it lacks power. Gentle whispers can say a lot. Words whispered, like "I love you," "I forgive you," or "It will be all right," can speak volumes and change lives. Those are just the words our Loving Lord whispers to us. He will continue to come into our lives with a gentle whisper and fill us with His love, His power, and His strength. Keep your spiritual ears open, God's Holy People. He comes in a gentle whisper.