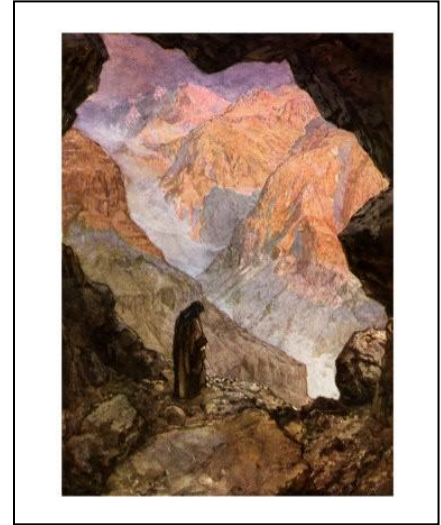


The Sound of Silence

I Kings 19:11-18

Opening Prayer

Lord, look upon me, see my misery. To whom should I flee, if not to You? How could I tolerate myself, but for the thought that You can tolerate me, but for the knowledge that you are still my friend? Look upon my misery, look upon Your servant who is lazy, headstrong, and superficial. Look upon the meanness of my heart, which offers You only as much as is absolutely necessary and will not be generous in loving You. Look upon my prayers: see how sullenly and reluctantly I fulfill this duty and how cheerfully, for the most part, my heart turns from talking with You to other things. Look upon my work: it is barely satisfactory, extorted from me by the pressure of daily life, rarely prompted by true love of You. Listen to my words: the words of selfless kindness and love are rare. Look upon me, O God: You will see no great sinner, only a small one; one whose very sins are small, mean, and commonplace, whose will and heart, mind and strength are mediocre in every respect, even in wickedness.



Elijah in the Desert of Horeb
by William Brassey Hole

Karl Rahner in Prayers for a Lifetime, page 6

1 Kings 19:11-18

¹¹The 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. ¹²After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. ¹³When 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?”

¹⁴He replied, “I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn 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.”

¹⁵The LORD said to him, “Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus. When you get there, anoint Hazael king over Aram. ¹⁶Also, anoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet. ¹⁷Jehu will put to death any who escape the sword of Hazael, and Elisha will put to death any who escape the sword of Jehu. ¹⁸Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and whose mouths have not kissed him.”¹

Comments

Elijah hiked 40 days and 300 miles from his broom tree in southern Judah to Mt. Horeb, also called Mt. Sinai. A month of walking must have had some therapeutic benefits for clearing the mind. He spent the

night before his encounter with Yahweh in a cave, the geologic womb for the nation of Israel, where some scholars believe Moses, centuries before, received the Ten Commandments from the Lord.

At dawn the Lord commanded Elijah to stand at the mouth of the cave while He passed by. What followed was a cataclysmic display of earth, wind, and fire, which is not only a good name for a rock band but might have appealed to a guy like Elijah who called fire from heaven, chased an idolatrous king with a thunder storm, and raised a dead boy back to life. But the Lord was not in those spectacular events. Instead, he revealed himself in gentle silence. (Literal Hebrew)

I wonder if the message for Elijah and us is that revival, which is the transformation of the heart towards loving God and neighbor, is more often-than-not quiet, invisible, and mundane. Expecting only impressive results can make us tone deaf to authentic results. Looking for God in silence requires an expectation adjustment that will ultimately bring healing to our fractured souls.

Quotes

If we have no silence, God is not heard in our music. If we have no rest, God does not bless our work. If we twist our lives out of shape in order to fill every corner of them with action and experience, God will silently withdraw from our hearts and leave us empty.

Thomas Merton

Action without reflection can easily become barren and even bitter. Without the space for self examination and the capacity for rejuvenation, the danger of exhaustion and despair is too great. Contemplation confronts us with the questions of our identity and power. Who are we? To whom do we belong? Is there a power that is greater than ours? How can we know it? Our drivenness must give way to peacefulness, and our anxiety to joy. So concerned with effectiveness, we learn instead to be content with faithfulness. Strategy grows into trust, success into obedience, planning into prayer.

Jim Wallis in the Soul of Politics page 200

Attentiveness is acquired by most people through a habit of reflectiveness—learning to step back from experience to ponder its meaning. Most often meaning presents itself to a gently disengaged consciousness—fierce interrogation habitually yields nothing. As Archimedes discovered, insights often come at the most unlikely moments. Those who give a high priority to the pursuit of wisdom should, accordingly, try to structure their lives so that times of disengagement are multiplied.

Michael Casey in Strangers to the City page 30

Our real journey in life is interior: it is a matter of growth, deepening, and of an ever greater surrender to the creative action of love and grace in our hearts. Never was it more necessary for us to respond to that action.

Thomas Merton

Benediction

We belong body and soul, in this life and the next, to our faithful Savior Jesus Christ. Amen