

Rev. Marvin Groote

Woodhaven Presbyterian Church, Irving, TX – Sunday, July 19, 2009

## LISTEN TO THE STILL, SMALL, VOICE

I Kings 19:9-21

**Alan Loy McGinnis** tells the following story:

"**The people I** admire always turn out to be people who practice rigorously the habit of a daily appointment with God. **I once asked** Dr. Louis Evans, Sr., at the time pastor of the largest Presbyterian church in the world, "**What is your secret?**" **Without blinking he** said, "**McGinnis, you can't** give out without taking in." **And he went** on to explain that he arrived at his study by 7:00 each morning and took no calls until 11:00. **Those hours were** devoted to prayer and study. **People who, in** Emerson's noble phrase, "live from a great depth of being," have always required time to contemplate, time to listen for guidance, to bask awhile in the awareness that we are cloaked in the love of God."

**There must have** been a bit of Elijah in Louis Evans Sr., for what Mr. Evans described about himself is just what Elijah did. **Elijah traveled across** the desert to come to the place known as the Mountain of God. **In this passage** the mountain is known as Horeb, in other places in the Bible it is known as Sinai. **It was where** Abraham was willing to offer up Isaac as a sacrifice. **It is the** place where Moses saw the burning bush. **It is the** place where Moses was offered the Ten Commandments. **And now, it** is the place where Elijah comes face to face with God.

**The encounter is** one that we will remember for a long time, for there are many implications for our own lives. **You will remember** that Elijah has just destroyed the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel. **That is one** of the fabulous episodes in Jewish history. **But the people** of Israel became very angry at the thoughts of having to do away with their worship of multiple gods and the fact that they were called to return to the worship of the one true God.

**Elijah was forced** to flee for his life. **And, being the** man of God that he was, he came to the mountain of God. **And there he** hid himself in the cleft of the rock, much like Moses did at the giving of the Ten Commandments. **And it was** there on the mountain

of Horeb that God was manifested to Elijah. **Initially God asked** Elijah why he was there. **Elijah gave a** variety of excuses, mainly in the tune of self-preservation. **The people of** Israel had rejected the word of God. **They had torn** down the altars in the high places. **The people had** killed the prophets. **And then Elijah** gives those famous words, "**And I am** the only one left and they are trying to kill me, too."

**God gives Elijah** an important command. **God said, "Go out and** stand on the side of the mountain, for the Lord is about to pass by." **And Elijah did** as he was commanded. **A mighty and** fierce wind, greater than all the tornados in the world came upon the mountain. **This wind was** so fierce that it split rocks in two. **But the comment** was made that the Lord was not in the wind. **Then came an** earthquake, which was more mighty than any earthquake before or since. **But the comment** was made that the Lord was not in the earthquake. **Then came a** fire that swept up and down the sides of the mountain, destroying everything that was in its path. **But once again** the comment was made that the Lord was not in the fire.

**Imagine the fear** that had to be present in Elijah's soul. **Three of the** most feared of natural events had come before Elijah in a very short period of time. **Death and destruction** were all around Elijah. **And yet, the** Lord had not yet been in any of these "natural events".

**Then came a** still, small, voice, or as the New International Version puts it, a gentle whisper. **Elijah was well** taught in Jewish history. **He placed his** cloak over his face, for he knew that no one could see the face of God and live. **The gentle whisper** asked once again, "**What are you** doing here, Elijah?" **And once again,** Elijah's reply is the same. **He said that** he had been very zealous for the Lord. **But the people** had broken down the altars in the high places, had rejected the covenant of God, had killed the prophets, and now were seeking to kill him.

**And then the** gentle whisper, that still, small, voice, came again to Elijah and gave him directions that would change the course of history in Israel. **Kings were to** be anointed, those who had broken the word of God would be put to death, and those who had kept the covenant of God, some seven-thousand in number, would be reserved for the recreation of the Children of Israel.

**It is in** these final words of our lesson today that the real message lies. **God comes to** us in many ways. **God approaches us** and asks the very question that Elijah was asked. "**What are you** doing here?" **I have been** asked that question and I would ask that question of you today. **What are you** doing here?

**A few months** ago I asked the staff of Grace Presbytery what their perception was of the changes that have happened since 9/11/2001. **The answers were** varied. **Some talked about** wars – **some talked about** security – **some talked about** the loss of control – **some talked about** the economy. **Our passage in** Kings today shares with us the cacophony that can be present in our lives – fire, earthquake, storm, war, security, loss of control, bad economic times – **they all draw** our attention and they all lead us away from our conversations with God. **What are you** doing here? **How are you** making yourself accessible to God? **How is God** seeking you? **For every one** of us the answers to these questions will be different. **We find the** answers to these questions by doing as Elijah did. **We find the** answers by placing ourselves into God's hands. **This is never** an easy thing to do, particularly when we attempt to control every aspect of our lives. **It is when** we place ourselves before God, only bowing our eyes to the very presence of God that we can find the answers.

**Listen to the** gentle whisper of God in your lives today. **Have you had** the feeling that God is calling you to some task? **Perhaps a task** that seems to be uncomfortable? **Have you heard** the call of God to speak to your neighbor down the street, the one that does not profess to know God, and invite him or her to join you in worship? **Have you heard** the call of God to approach someone whom you have wronged, and to rekindle that friendship? **Have you heard** the call of God to greater service in God's kingdom?

**The life of** Elijah goes forth from the mountain of God into a life of service in whatever way that God directed. **And all of** that started with the simple question, "**What are you** doing here?" **Great things can** happen at Woodhaven Presbyterian Church and great things can happen to the people of God who listen to the gentle whisper of the Spirit of God. **Listen today for** what God would have in store for you.

**Amen.**