

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost
Proper 7
Grace Church of West Feliciana Parish
Saint Francisville, LA
1 Kings 19:1-15a

- “A sound of sheer silence”
- We are often uncomfortable with silence - especially in this information age of 24-hour news, youtube videos, facebook, and streaming music,
- We have a hard time - remaining silent - hearing nothing, saying nothing
- And silence, the kind of silence I’m talking about - is more than just the mere absence of sound
 - Sitting around - endlessly scrolling through the newsfeed on my phone - is not silence
 - typing comments or hitting the “like” button on the latest photos or status updates of my friends - is not silence
- Silence is more than that - or perhaps, it is better to say - less than that - the absence of external stimulation - outside information - the lack of activity - of exertion
- It is an emptying - a being laid bare - being alert and attentive - fully receptive
- Silence can be difficult because it makes us aware of how uncomfortable we are with ourselves - of being alone with our thoughts - with our struggles - with our inadequacies
- Often - when this happens - we have a tendency to externalize our shortcomings - “Other people are to blame, it is not my fault, I’ve been doing the right thing - I’m a good person - it is everybody else - they have lost their way - they’re out to get me.”
- This is what Elijah does, is it not?
 - “I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts” - *I’m a good person, I’ve been doing the right thing* - “for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away” - *it is everybody else - they have lost their way - they’re out to get me*
- But, “what are you doing here, Elijah?”
- That is the question that Elijah faces in the silence - questioning himself - “what are you doing here?” - did you not just see the awesome power of God displayed at Mt. Carmel, when the Lord sent a fireball down from heaven to consume the offering and the altar, were not the priests of Baal defeated, and all the gathered people of Israel who witnessed this amazing spectacle acknowledge - “truly, the Lord is God - the Lord is God”
- What are you doing here, Elijah? Where is your faith?

- It is interesting how - if we remain with the silence long enough - we may stop externalizing our shortcomings - our blaming of other people - and have a change of perspective - turn our gaze inward - see ourselves in a new light.
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- Several years ago, I participated in the annual “Summer Vocation Program” at a small Anglican Benedictine monastery in Southern Michigan. In this program, young men from around the country come together for a few weeks to experience monastic life - eating, working and praying alongside the monks – ultimately, to see whether they might have a monastic calling. Every day, after evening prayer in the chapel, we would have an optional 20-30 minutes before dinner for silent meditation –which is usually something I really enjoy.
- I often like to use a prayer rope in my meditation - like this bracelet - with little knots that you pass through your fingers, while silently repeating the “Jesus Prayer,” - “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me a sinner” - a way to quiet the mind and the heart: “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me a sinner, Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me a sinner...”
- As it so happens, during the program I was assigned a choir stall next to another “vocationer”– who always stayed in the chapel after evening prayer, and who would never sit still – the whole time he was constantly fidgeting, adjusting his kneeler, rustling through pages of the prayer book, rattling prayer beads – picking them up, putting them down, picking them up, putting them down –
- After three or four days of this, I was livid. And I’m staring at him, no longer trying to hide my annoyance, thinking “what is wrong with this guy” – doesn’t he know we’re supposed to be meditating, contemplating different theological mysteries or striving for an inner silence in which we might more fully consent to God’s presence and action - what is he doing? He can’t even sit still for five minutes. He shouldn’t be here - clearly he doesn’t have what it takes to be a monk – and he is ruining it for the rest of us
- Then I looked to my left – and I see one of the monks of the monastery- an older man, sitting perfectly still with his eyes closed, looking totally calm and serene.
- And suddenly my question changed from: “What’s wrong with this guy?” to “What’s wrong with me?”
- Obviously the monk hears the noise – you couldn’t not hear it – he’s just not letting it bother him.
- And whereas this guy is just fidgeting and moving around –I’m actively hating him - (which is far worse)
- It is almost as if I was made aware of the question - “what are you doing here?”
- I’m supposed to be meditating - and I’ve let the sounds of some beads and rustling paper - not only keep me from praying, but drive me to wish ill upon another child of God. Wow, not “what is wrong with this guy?” - but, “what is wrong with me?” I have a lot of work to do...

- And so, I began saying again - in a different register this time - often repeated words that held new meaning for me: "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me a sinner," "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner," "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me a sinner"
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- If you have been watching the 24-hour news cycle, listening to the radio, or scrolling through your facebook feed - you'll know that some truly awful and terrible events have occurred over the past several days
- A mass shooting in orlando - a young child killed by an alligator -
- How do we react to news like this? News that makes us feel vulnerable - unsafe - maybe angry
- It is sad - but not surprising - to see that many people are quick to externalize their discomfort - to start casting blame on others, politicizing the events - talking about who should be punished, who is liable - wanting to pass new laws and legislation - as if making something illegal would stop it from happening
 - "This is why - We need more guns, or fewer guns - should keep out the muslims - or be more embracing of marginalized groups - treat the LGBT or latino communities differently"
 - "It is the parent's fault - the company's fault - they should watch more closely - they need better signage"
- Fire and brimstone, earthquakes and hurricanes - what is happening in the world? We have to do something! The people have lost their way -
- Where is God in all this?
- God was not in the wind, not in the earthquake, not in the fire - "and after the fire a sound of sheer silence"
- In tragic moments - moments of chaos and disorder - moments when the world seems to be coming apart - perhaps what we need is not to do more, but less - not to voice our outrage, to cast blame, but to remain silent - to grieve - to be laid bare, made open and vulnerable - to acknowledge and sit with the pain - to acknowledge and recognize the irreplaceable loss - the tragedy - our wounded and fragile condition - while all the while remaining attentive to the "still small voice" of God - who assures us: you are not alone - despite what you may think - I am with you - amidst the chaos and turmoil, I have not abandoned you - put your trust in the Lord, who reaches out - in the silence - calls us out of ourselves - and assures us that he is with us just as we are in him
- and that he has set us upon the sure foundation of his loving-kindness.
- Amen