



A SERMON by Rev. Marcella Auld Glass: November 9, 2025



TODAY IN WORSHIP, WE'LL HEAR A STORY ABOUT THE PROPHET ELIJAH who both fell prey to the illusion that he was alone and had to do everything all by his own self, and who also was then sent into the wilderness to be alone for 40 days.

The idea of being left alone with just my self for 40 days is terrifying for my extroverted self, but I know some of you would call that a vacation, and are asking how to sign up for Elijah's wilderness trip. We struggle, I think, between feeling alone and isolated and feeling called into community. We mistake being in crowds for doing the harder work of being in community. We want to be independent and self reliant, but God made us to be there for and with each other.

As we enter worship this morning, I invite you to think about the contradictions we feel about our aloneness, our connection to the world and to each other. Listen to this poem by David Whyte, called *Everything is Waiting for You*.

Everything is Waiting for You

Written by David Whyte

Your great mistake is to act the drama
as if you were alone. As if life
were a progressive and cunning crime
with no witness to the tiny hidden
transgressions. To feel abandoned is to deny
the intimacy of your surroundings. Surely,
even you, at times, have felt the grand array;
the swelling presence, and the chorus, crowding
out your solo voice. You must note
the way the soap dish enables you,
or the window latch grants you freedom.
Alertness is the hidden discipline of familiarity.
The stairs are your mentor of things
to come, the doors have always been there
to frighten you and invite you,
and the tiny speaker in the phone
is your dream-ladder to divinity.

Put down the weight of your aloneness and ease into the
conversation. The kettle is singing
even as it pours you a drink, the cooking pots
have left their arrogant aloofness and
seen the good in you at last. All the birds
and creatures of the world are unutterably
themselves. Everything is waiting for you.

1 Kings 19:1-18

Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "So may the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life like the life of one of them by this time tomorrow." Then Elijah was afraid; he got up and fled for his life, and came to Beer-sheba, which belongs to Judah; he left his servant there. But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a solitary broom tree. He asked that he might die: "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my ancestors."

Then he lay down under the broom tree and fell asleep. Suddenly an angel touched him and said to him, "Get up and eat." He looked, and there at his head was a cake baked on hot stones, and a jar of water. He ate and drank, and lay down again. The angel of the Lord came a second time, touched him, and said, "Get up and eat, otherwise the journey will be too much for you." He got up, and ate and drank; then he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God.

At that place he came to a cave, and spent the night there. Then the word of the Lord came to him, saying, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" He answered, "I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; 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."

He said, "Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by." Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the

fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then there came a voice to him that said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" He answered, "I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; 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."

Then the Lord said to him, "Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus; when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael as king over Aram. Also you shall anoint Jehu son of Nimshi as king over Israel; and you shall anoint Elisha son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah as prophet in your place. Whoever escapes from the sword of Hazael, Jehu shall kill; and whoever escapes from the sword of Jehu, Elisha shall kill. Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him."

OUR TEXT THIS MORNING PICKS UP AFTER QUITE AN EXCITING STORY. The prophet Elijah takes on the prophets of Ba'al and Asherah, all 850 of them, and challenges them to a scene made for reality TV, *a prophet-off*, if you will. Israel has been following false Gods.

A brief History lesson: After King Solomon's rule, the United Kingdom of Israel collapses, in part because of the bills from building Solomon's ballroom, I mean the Temple. The Northern Tribes rebelled against the Davidic line and they become Israel in the divided kingdom. The tribes of Judah and Benjamin, in the South, become the nation of Judah. Ahab is king of the Northern kingdom of Israel. His wife, Jezebel, is a foreigner. Their marriage was a political alliance to bring peace on the Phoenician border. She brings with her some of her gods from home, and those gods must have been appealing, because there are lots of prophets, and the people flocked to these false gods.

Elijah shows up as a prophet of the one, true God and is a thorn in the side of Ahab and Jezebel. They want to silence him, because Elijah's trying to call the people back to the Lord, away from the lure of the false gods. Ahab and Jezebel trying to keep their political alliance together by promoting the worship of all of the gods. Ahab and Jezebel's message is: *Want to come to church, worship the king, the flag, and money while worshiping the Lord? You can have it all! Join us!*

That message was seductive then and it is seductive now.

And Ahab and Jezebel want to kill Elijah. They've already killed over a hundred prophets of the Lord. So, to our reality show.

I'll let you read chapter 18 in your free time, but here are some highlights—Elijah challenges the prophets of the false gods to a show down. His God against their gods. He even stacks the deck in their favor. And then he mocks them. Then he crushes them. Then he kills them all. Then he flees.

Elijah flees, which, on first glance seems an odd response to the overwhelming victory he had in chapter 18, doesn't it? Ahab, meanwhile, goes back and tells Jezebel what happened to all of her prophets, which is where our text today picks up.

Elijah knows all about the power of God. He's just seen it in full and public display.

And yet. He flees. And then he gives up.

"It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life, for I am no better than my ancestors."

I can't decide if Elijah's humanity here is horribly depressing or comforting.

I'd like to think that if only I could see God's awesome acts of power, as Elijah did on Mt Carmel, that I'd have faith enough to spare. That's all I really need, I think. Just one big miracle like the showdown with the false prophets and I'll be good.

But we're just a few verses after his moment of triumph, right after he's won the battle, and Elijah is asking to die because he feels alone. He may not be afraid of false prophets, but he is certainly afraid of Jezebel and Ahab. And, even though he has just seen God put on a resounding display, it doesn't occur to him that the God who delivered him then will deliver him now.

We are like that too, of course. Miracles are all around us, even in our own lives. And then something happens—Jezebel comes making her threats, and we go blank. A crisis of confidence, that erases what we know to be true and replaces it with panic.

I don't know why this happened to Elijah. I don't know why it happens to us. You'd think that the signs and wonders he had seen would have been enough to sustain him. You'd think they'd be enough to always sustain us.

They don't. Perhaps this text is a reminder to us that signs and wonders, like the show Elijah puts on before the prophets of Baal in the earlier chapter, are not what sustain faith. Community sustains faith. And when we are cut off from each other, there aren't enough signs and wonders in the world to make up for it.

Perhaps this text is a reminder to us that the voices of this world, the threats of Ahab and Jezebel, are more than mere words. They are often scary enough to cause us to forget what we know to be true. They are often loud enough to drown out the sound of our faith. They are convincing enough to make us lose hope and to give in to despair.

This story catches Elijah when he feels completely alone. Totally isolated. So cut off from other people and maybe even from God that he feels he alone is left. He had also just killed 850 prophets of Ba'al and Asherah. It is possible to imagine how that could make you feel alone and cut off, no matter how much you felt you had done the right thing. *Taking human lives is not a trivial matter.*

Ahab and Jezebel had also killed hundreds of God's prophets, Elija's colleagues, some of them were probably his friends from seminary and presbytery meetings. There is a lot of death in the background of this text, and when we don't allow our grief and loss to be at the front of our story when it needs to be, we feel isolated, cut off from people who could help us.

There is a lot of grief and loss in our world too.

When we don't allow our grief and loss to be at the front of our story, we feel isolated, cut off from people who could help us.

I alone am left.

When I hear that phrase from Elijah, I hear it as a confession of defeat and failure. I confess that if I think about it in my own life, though, I am a person who can prize my aloneness, my independence, as if it were a badge of pride.

I alone am left. (Sad trombone)

Or...

I alone am left! Yeah! (Cue the Rocky soundtrack!)

As a child, I was famous for often saying, "I can do it me own self!"

Narrator: she could not, in fact, do it her own self.

Asking for help is the hardest thing I ever do. Accepting help that is offered is a close second. Many years ago, I was leading worship when cold or flu symptoms came on. I'd felt fine that morning, but mid-way through the sermon, I was not fine. I had to sit down to finish the sermon. And then it was communion, and I knew I couldn't stand at the table and that whatever I had meant I probably shouldn't be anywhere near the table with my germs, so I asked an elder to come and read the liturgy and preside at communion.

I found someone to take my place at the adult ed class and was going to go home. It felt like I had already inconvenienced enough people by the end of that service. Someone then said they were going to give me a ride home and their spouse would drive my car home for me. I tried to brush them off with "I'll be fine, you don't have to stand up when you're driving" and she demanded my keys and they drove me home, where I slept for 3 days.

I am not proud to tell you that story. I am very grateful for everyone in that story who would not let me go it alone, and for everyone else, at all those other moments of my life who have reminded me that I am not alone with their care, their presence, their bossy refusal to let me go it alone.

I alone am left.

I really am feeling personally attacked by this scripture passage. I like it a lot better when it convicts you than when it convicts me.

Over time, I have learned to accept help when it is offered, and on my better days, I can even sometimes ask for help that hasn't been offered. I've been blessed, throughout my life, with some amazing communities who have cared for me and reminded me I am not alone. My family, my sorority in college, my whole college experience, actually, all the congregations I've been a part of—there are too many to name, but all of them have called me away from falling prey to the lie that I alone am left.

Like the angel who shows up when Elijah is asleep under the broom tree, my communities have fed and cared for me so the journey wouldn't be too much for me.

In bible study, while looking at this passage, my friend and I noticed that when Elijah tells God he is feeling alone, God sends him into the wilderness for 40 more days of being alone.

I'm a person who prefers being 'in the mix', and with people, far more than I want to be alone, with only myself for company. Even when I have to do solitary work, such as writing sermons, I do better in the middle of a loud coffee shop than I do in the sheer silence of my empty house.

It's changing a little for me as I get older. I'm more inclined to decide a day spent by myself is not some sort of divine punishment, but might be a reward.

Even so, the idea of being sent into 40 more days of isolation when I already felt alone? *I do not like that plan.* And I think many people are afraid of the silence of their own thoughts because maybe we're afraid of what we'll find there. *Will the inner critic be so loud we can't drown them out? Will our fears be revealed to be true?*

I wonder what God needed Elijah to know, to come to understand, when he was feeling alone. What was it Elijah needed 40 days and 40 nights by himself in the wilderness to work out?

You think you alone are left, Elijah? Okay, have fun in the wilderness!

It gets me twitchy, all of this time in the wilderness, left alone with my own thoughts. In truth, even when I'm by myself, I rarely feel alone. I can text my friends, call someone. I can be distracted by the earthquakes of the news cycle, or the wind of whatever is coming out of Washington, or the fires of personal conflicts or stress.

God draws Elijah away from the tumult and the noise of Jezebel and Ahab and toward the mountain of God. And, after a 40-day journey, he reaches the mountain of God where Moses saw God pass by, and the Earth, Wind and Fire appear. Elijah is told to stand on the mountain as God passes by. But God wasn't in the noise, destruction, chaos, tumult or flames. God was in the sheer silence that followed.

The text says the Lord was not in the earthquake, or the wind, or the fire.

I don't think that means God is absent from the earthquakes, wind, and fire that disrupt and trouble our lives. We believe there is nothing in life or in death that could separate us from the love of God.

I wonder if it suggests that if we really want to find God, we can't get distracted by the actions of politicians and Ahabs and Jezebels, the destruction of human violence, and reach the conclusion that all of the destruction they cause is what God intends.

Elijah, despite his crisis of confidence, is able to recognize God when God appears. And, it seems likely to me, that the silence was not the place Elijah would have first been seeking God.

In the Biblical account, when God appears, God is usually in a burning bush, or a pillar of fire by night or pillar of dust by day. The word for God's Spirit is the same word for wind. And perhaps we expect God to be flashy. To put on a show. To wow us with laser light shows and displays of grandeur—*like God had just done in the prophet—off for Elijah in the previous chapter*. We want God to be Earth, Wind, and Fire.

For Elijah at his weakest moment, God is in the absence of noise, asking: **"What are you doing here, Elijah?"**

I love this question. It can mean so many things.

Why are you here as my prophet, Elijah?

Why are you here—40 days into the wilderness—and not somewhere else?

Why are you here feeling sorry for yourself?

Why are you alone and so far from others who could help you?

Why are you here—on this earth?

Elijah gives the same answer both times the question is asked. Here it is: *"I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; 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."*

I'm not convinced Elijah answers God's question, yet God seems to see the answer that is hidden in Elijah's reply—I'm isolated and alone and can't remember the things that are important.

God offers Elijah grace and gives him the answers he needs. Elijah is given some concrete tasks, he's told to appoint Jehu king, and Jehu will clean up the political mess. And he is told to appoint Elisha as his successor. Elijah is not alone—on either the political or the spiritual front.

Through sheer silence, God calls him back to his purpose, God gives Elijah answers to the question God was asking him and sends him back to community and back to work—fed, nourished, and equipped for the journey.

It occurred to me this week that even though the answers are the same words, I wonder if the subtext under the words is different at the beginning than it is at the end. If I were directing Elijah in a play, I would have him read the first answer in his most whiny and pathetic voice. "I alone am left. Woe is me" But the second time, after 40 days and nights of being alone, I'd direct him to answer it with the weight of it. "I. Alone. Am. Left."

Elijah had been doing it all himself. He didn't take a committee to battle the false prophets. And hadn't been taking care of himself. And he was distracted by the noise of earthquakes, wind, and fire. And he forgot who he was, and whose he was. At first, he was whining because he was alone and scared and jangly, in need of a nap and a snack. The second time he answers God, I think he was aware that he had isolated himself in the wrong ways, aware the sounds and distractions of the world had gotten in his way.

Thinking about this text has called to mind for me a quote by Corrie Ten Boom, a Dutch Christian and Holocaust survivor, who said, "Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God." I think that was what God was trying to get Elijah to see during the midst of his crisis of confidence.

As it was for Elijah, the future we cannot imagine can also be a scary place. We don't know what the future holds.

There are voices all around us telling us to be afraid of just about everything, but the Ahabs and Jezebels of this world are just speculating. They cause real damage, don't get me wrong. But they are not the ultimate power in the world. They are noise.

And the noise of chaos, tumult, and fear are nothing compared to the sound of God's sheer silence.

How is it with your soul these days? There's a lot of earthquake-y stories out there, calling us away from our connections to each other and our connections to God.

Where do you find the silence in the midst of the noise, so that you can hear God?

This week, I had the privilege of waiting outside the ICE building with a family from the presbytery who needed to go to their immigration check-in, and who were rightly afraid to do so. Two mornings this week, I stood there, wearing my clergy collar, and it wasn't silent on that downtown street. But I was largely silent, because I don't speak Spanish. I couldn't solve any of the troubles this family was facing. I couldn't do or say anything useful. But I could be there. I could offer a smile to the other people in line, remind them they weren't alone.

That's where I heard God this week. Not in the chaos of storms caused by our government, or in the flashes of power we see from weak men pretending to be tough. It was in the presence of people who were scared to show up to their hearings, but who also were trying to do the right thing to save their families.

I debated whether or not to even tell this story because I don't want anyone to think I was doing anything heroic or worthy of praise. There was no risk to me. And lots of other people in this room, let alone in the community, have put themselves on the line in much bigger ways. But if I can use my whiteness, and my privilege, to participate in whatever small way I can so that others know they aren't alone, I want to do that.

If you want to be there too, accompanying people outside ICE hearings, talk to one of us later. But there are many ways you care for people amidst the earthquakes, winds, and fires of our world. When you volunteer at the Interfaith Food Pantry, when you sign up to serve lunch at Martin de Porres, when you volunteer with youth, or seniors. The list is long and many of them are at the back of your bulletins.

The gift of community, and the lesson that was hard for both me and Elijah to learn, is that we don't have to do it all by ourselves. If each of us participates in whatever way we're called to do it, people will be cared for and the journey won't be too difficult for any of us. Your gifts of time, of presence, of treasure, of talent—they all make a difference in the world. Because we, together, can do exponentially more than any of us can do on our own, all by ourselves. Thank you for your generosity that creates community and that offers care.

We are walking into an unknown future with a known God. The God who has provided for us in the past, is laying out the plans that will guide us through the future. May we learn to be comfortable listening for God—whether it is in the chaos and tumult or in the sheer silence. Friends, never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God. Amen.