

Have you ever been in a similar position to Elijah? I don't mean under a broom tree or even in a cave atop Mt. Horeb. In life, have you ever been on the run without a destination; ever been so weighed down by the past or the present or the future you just want to freeze; ever felt like you have failed and what good could possibly be redeemed from your circumstance; ever long so desperately for God to talk to you and yet you never seem to hear God? In life, have you ever needed guidance or direction; ever wondered what is going to happen next; ever longed for understanding or wisdom that you just can't seem to grasp; ever at a point when you throw your hands up and say, “what now?” If you can answer yes to any of these, today's message is for you! And if you think, “Oh, I don't know”, it is especially for you because God desires to be a more prominent voice in your life.

Is it possible to talk anymore about hearing and listening without at least mentioning “Can you hear me now?” You know, the infamous Verizon tagline. Distance ... Can you hear me now? Volume (demonstrate with a regular, loud, and then soft) ... Can you hear me now? All languages and translations ... Can you hear me now?

Perhaps a better story pertinent for us this morning about hearing and listening is entitled “Listening for Crickets” from *Growing Souls* by Mark Yaconelli. I have shared this story before, but it has been a few years at least since we heard it, so I thought it was worth sharing again.

*A friend of mine attended a Christian pastors' conference in downtown Atlanta, Georgia. The participants, gathered from across North America, included one Native American pastor who was on his first trip to a major metropolitan city. During a lunch break the Native American pastor took a walk outside with one of his colleagues. As they stretched their legs along the busy sidewalk, the pastor suddenly stopped, turned to his companion, and said, “Do you hear that?” The friend paused and considered the bustling noise of the city. “Hear what?” he replied. Planted along the downtown sidewalk was a small row of trees. At the base of each tree was a circle of flowers. The pastor walks over to one of the trees, knelt down, reaching beneath one of the floral clusters, then stood and opened his hand, revealing a small black bug. “It's a cricket.” Dumbfounded, his friend replied, “How could you possibly hear that?” The Native American pastor reaching into his pants pocket, took out a handful of coins, and threw them into the air. As the coins hit the cement, people from all directions stopped and looked down. The pastor turned to his companion and said, “It depends on what you are listening for.”*

In our lives, what are we listening for? Who are we listening for?  
Church... what are we listening for? Who are we listening for?

“Sadly, the Christian church is losing its capacity to listen. We forget what it means to sit still, to be silent, and to wait until we hear the voice of the One who calls us by name. We’re losing our capacity to be surprised and amazed by what we hear. We’ve become a church more responsive to the predictable clinking sounds of the marketplace than the surprisingly still, small voice of God. Instead of heeding the call to “be still before the Lord, and wait patiently,” we “fret” and worry and “plot” (Psalm 27). Driven by our fearful voices we run ahead of grace, frantically seeking a plan, a strategy, a formula for securing a Christian life. A culture that no longer listens to God becomes increasingly noisy. Every idea must be exploited, every insight publicized, every sermon downloaded, every passing thought blogged and posted. We live in a time when everyone is talking at once- a time when the truth isn’t hidden but drowned in a sea of irrelevance.”

“Christianity is relationship; and any counselor worth her/his salt will tell you that every healthy relationship is based on listening. To love someone, to befriend someone, to really know someone, you have to be willing to listen. You have to continually set aside your own agendas, perceptions, and evaluations, and listen in order to avoid misjudging or misunderstanding the other. Continually! Listening is difficult.” (*Growing Souls*, Mark Yaconelli, pg. 18-19)

- **Mark 4:23-** Jesus says his followers are those **who have “ears to hear.”**
- **John 10:14-** Jesus says his followers are those **who walk with heads tilted, straining to hear the voice of the “good shepherd”.**
- *Maybe you recall last week when we talked about new life and that to have a new life with Christ, we must die to that which isn’t life and light, that which isn’t of God. To have new life in Christ is to be changed, the old life gone, and new life begun.* **John 5:25-** Jesus claims that those **who know how to listen will one day hear the voice of God and will overcome death.**

In 1 Kings 19, we encounter a chapter of Elijah’s life and are invited to listen in as God interacts with Elijah. At this point, Elijah is ready to give up and throw in the towel. He tells God he is no better than any of the ancestors or anyone else. He offers to God that he just needs to die. God does two remarkable things in this chapter.

1. One, God invites Elijah to chill out and slow down. Elijah is tired, and emotional, and reacting, and he is hangry. Under a broom tree, God appears to Elijah with the invitation for him to rest. Upon waking, bread to satisfy the hunger was there. He was invited to take another nap and upon waking, eat again. Chill out Elijah! Simmer down a bit! Put something on your stomach. The journey is long, and you will need strength.

2. The second thing Elijah is invited to do is listen for God. Elijah has made it to a holy place, Mt. Horeb. While making himself available to God, an earthquake comes. Surely God is speaking in the earthquake? God has shaken the ground beneath our feet before. But nope! Fire comes. Surely God is speaking in the fire? Like God did with Moses and the burning bush? But nope! A violent wind comes. Wind and Spirit are alike, so surely God is speaking in the hustle and bustle of the wind? But nope! Then the sound of sheer silence. For Elijah, God speaks, and God delivers to the one who was listening, in the sound of sheer silence.

God is a God who speaks. All throughout Scripture we encounter God's voice guiding and giving, defending and directing, providing and protecting, encouraging and equipping. Do we, as God's children, have ears to hear? Are our heads tilted slightly straining to hear the voice of "the good shepherd"?

What would our lives be, what would the church be, if we are a people with "ears to hear" the still, small voice or peace within the rush of our lives and demands of the world? What would our lives be, what would the church be, if we are a people who truly attend to our experience of God, which includes our nearness to God (Who do we know God to be, believe God to be), our relatedness to Jesus (How is Jesus' example a GPS setting for our words and actions), and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit empowering us for acts of mercy, justice, peace?

God is a God who speaks. God is a God who is faithful. God is a God of glory. God is a God of love, grace, and hope. God is a God who seeks to fulfill what is true to the will and way of God's heavenly kingdom and God does not or will not contradict or compromise with anything less to do that! Here is the cool thing, I think. God invites us to be a part of God's fulfillment! God speaks and we are to listen! God directs and we are to follow! God guides and we are to GO! God encourages and we are to engage! God offers us a way and we are to be obedient!

God is speaking... Can you hear ME now? (Normal)  
Can you hear ME now? (Loud and Crazy)  
Can you hear ME now? (Still, small voice)  
Can you hear Me now? (sign, no voice)

Let all God's people say... Amen.