

Sometimes we need to hide in a cave
June 20, 2010 –Rev. Jim Cullen

Betty Jentsch was home with her 16 year old daughter Emily last Sunday afternoon when she heard “a roaring thunder sound that wasn’t stopping.”

She looked out her window at the Creek which flowed down a hill next to her property from a reservoir lake built in the 1930’s. “Just a wall of mud was coming down the creek,” she said.

She ran upstairs and found her daughter. When the pair got back downstairs, she looked out the back door and saw a “mountain of mud with my vehicle coming toward the house,” she said.

The mother and daughter ran out the door and headed north as quickly as they could, running through orchards and hopping several fences until they reached higher ground. She looked back and saw a mountain of mud including their garage coming their way.

The cherry orchard next door is covered with 10 feet of mud. The main road is impassable and the people of Oliver BC are coming to grips with what happened to several homes in their community. People are coming to grips with the loss of their homes and the changed landscape of their community.

This week we saw pictures of an overturned bus in Switzerland. We learned that two Canadians were killed in the accident. They were former teachers in Wellington who later moved to Brockville.

There were two news items from the Toronto area where different parents killed one of their children. These and your own personal stories remind us that there are times in life when the burdens are just too great. There are times when we not only want to but need to run away.

This takes us back to the Old Testament this morning. When we read such stories we understand that the lessons learned generations ago still have value for us today.

The story is about the prophet Elijah. He got into conflict with the prophets of the nature god Baal, insisting that his god was the real God. Anyway, he won. He killed them all. (After all these are OT times and stories were quite brutal.) Queen Jezebel was a follower of these prophets who were killed. She said she was going to get Elijah and get him soon.

Elijah was afraid so he took off. After a days running he rested under a tree and said to God, ***“Take away my life, for I am no better than my ancestors.”*** Then he fell asleep. The story goes on to say that an angel brought him some food. For the next little while Elijah eats and sleeps and eats and sleeps. He then took off and traveled to a mountain that had spiritual significance. There he found a cave and crawled in to hide.

So far, I think we can follow what is happening to Elijah. In our worst, our most difficult days, our first reaction is to withdraw, to have someone offer food, encourage us to sleep while we wish we could run away and make it all go away.

The story is about God being with Elijah on this fearful journey. God is there to offer food, encourage sleep, caring for him body and soul and then wakes him up and gets him moving on his journey.

At this point Elijah is in the cave and God says it is time move on, to get going again. He tells him to go outside. God was going 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 the Lord said to him, “Go and return on your way...”***

And so it is that in all the chaos of life, and the noise and burden of all that is destructive, we come to the notion that it is in sheer silence that God can speak to us. Think about times when you experience sheer silence. When you sit with someone who is dying or has just died – there is sheer silence. When you hear devastating or at least upsetting news – silence often follows. Silence is a wonderful replacement for too many words too many comments trying to explain something.

The lessons we learn from Elijah is that it is in those moments of sheer silence that we can sense the presence of God. And out of that experience we can take a step forward.

“Perhaps we can see a pattern in the succession of wind, earthquake, and fire. It is as if God is letting the elements become a mirror of the prophet’s behavior. Elijah’s actions seem larger than life. He displays power to overcome opposition. His speech is impassioned. He rages like the elements. Perhaps by showing Elijah the futility of this approach, God helps him to discern another way – Whether there is truth in this insight, the experience has healed Elijah to the point where God can say, ***Go, return on your way.***

There comes for us all the moment to return to the fray. We have wisely sought relief and rest. We have managed to do some clear thinking. We have realized that we need a grace beyond our beleaguered self. Now we can face the demands of life again. ...There is no permanent escape from the wilderness, whatever form it takes in our lives. The important thing to realize is that, in the wilderness, there dwells one who offers us companionship and grace.” (from Herbert O’Driscoll)

As our worship draws to a close this morning we will sing a prayer together...*Breathe through the heat of our desire thy coolness and thy balm, let sense be dumb, let flesh retire, speak through the earthquake, wind and fire, O still small voice of calm.*(#608)