

1 Kings 19:9b-21

Later this week, some of you may join the crowds that gather to “ooh” and “aah” as fireworks light up the night sky. And the thing about fireworks is that the bigger and brighter they are, the more excited the crowd becomes. The ones that are smaller and less colorful bring a few “aah’s” from the crowd, but the ones that cover the sky with brilliant colors bring out loud exclamations from everyone.

In our text, Elijah was watching a fireworks show of sorts, and he, too, was surely impressed. The show began with a great and mighty wind that tore the mountains and broke the rocks to pieces. An earthquake followed the wind, and after the earthquake came a fire. And through it all, Elijah stood by watching from the top of a high mountain.

Now this fireworks show, in which Elijah had a front-row seat, was not a celebration of the nation’s independence. It was done to make a dramatic point to Elijah, and to all of us who are hearing and pondering this text today. And that point is made with the grand finale. What can possibly top a violent wind, an earthquake, and fire? A still, small voice...the sound of a low whisper. This was the grand finale. This is what caused Elijah to get out of his lounge chair, stop what he was doing, and prepare himself to meet the Lord.

How disappointed the crowds would be today if the grand finale to a spectacular fireworks show was a single pop...and not very loud at that. We want impressive stuff! We want to be “wowed” out of our seats. But for Elijah, it was not the impressive display of power that caught his attention the most. It was the low whisper that followed--the barely audible still, small voice. You see, God was not in the wind. It says so. He was not in the earthquake. And He was not in the fire. But He was the one behind the low whisper.

Let’s back up a bit and check out what was happening that put Elijah on that mountain in the first place. He was running away...running for his life. Queen Jezebel was after him to kill him because he had killed hundreds of her false prophets on the top of Mt. Carmel. Elijah ran, and he walked, and he walked some more. And then he saw it. The mountain. But not just any old mountain...Mt. Sinai. The very mountain where God had given His Law through Moses 600 years before. And as Moses had done, so now Elijah climbs Mt. Sinai, and he sits and waits--waits for God to take action.

You see, Elijah was not very happy. He was depressed, and he was frustrated. He felt like complaining, and he did complain to God. *“I have been very jealous,”* he said, *“for (You), Lord. (Your) people have forsaken Your covenant, thrown down Your altars, and killed Your prophets...and only I am left, and they seek my life, too.”* “It’s time to act, Lord,” is what he was surely thinking. “Do something impressive! Everyone but me is against You. Show Your power and put a stop to all this madness.”

That’s what we think, too, isn’t it? It’s gone far enough, Lord. Abortion, pornography, homosexuality, violence, drugs. The church is suffering from lack of interest. Many members are apathetic. Attendance is down. Giving is down. But persecutions are up. Everything is going in the wrong direction in the world and in the church.” Do something, Lord!” we say with Elijah.

But if we’re waiting for God to unleash His power against everything that is wrong and evil, then we’re waiting for the final Judgment, and we, too, will be judged. For everything that is wrong and evil out there, is also in here. Everything that I detest in society dwells also in me. Everything that I hate in my neighbor has a home within my heart as well. I simply refuse to see it and admit it. So if I

want to see God's fireworks, I may be shocked by what I see. Just as Jesus rebuked James and John for wanting to call down fire from heaven upon the heathen, so you and I need that same rebuke when we judge others, but refuse to judge ourselves.

Do you realize that Jesus never did a miracle involving fire? Of all the hundreds of miracles that He did, not one involved fire in any way. That's because fire is reserved for the final Judgment. Jesus stepped into the fires of hell on the cross for you, and for every sinner. He did not call down fire from heaven upon others. He let that fire fall upon Himself. He suffered the agony of what our sins deserve. He endured the punishment that we should have for all eternity. Those who reject His sacrifice on the cross, who refuse His mercy and grace, will feel the fires of Judgment to come. But until that final day of reckoning, the wheat and tares will grow together. The wicked will dwell with the saints, and the saints will suffer persecution.

God made it clear to Elijah that the most impressive action He takes is not to destroy the wicked with a grand display of His power. He was not in the wind, or in the earthquake, or in the fire, but He was in the low whisper...the still, small voice. Many years later that voice would be heard again as Jesus opened His mouth on the cross. Not, "Destroy them, Father!" but "*Father, forgive them,*" is what He said. The most impressive thing about God is that He shows mercy to the unmerciful, He loves the unlovable, He forgives sinners--even the worst of the worst, the most wretched of the wretched.

If God was to seek out evil to destroy it, then there would be fireworks here in Augusta, Missouri, for He would be seeking out each one of us to destroy us, for we are all evil within our hearts. But Jesus died for you. God rained down His fireworks upon His Son in your place. And now He seeks you only with love. He finds you with His still, small voice. The voice spoken over you when you were baptized. The voice that is preached to you from the pulpit. The voice that speaks God's forgiveness to you.

It's not a loud, dramatic voice. It's a low whisper, barely audible. For even though Christ died for all, most in the world are not listening. But you are. By God's grace, you are. You are here today not for fireworks, but to hear God's whisper. "Dear sinner," He says to every one of you, "I forgive you. All your sins are forgiven. Go in peace and sin no more." If you want fireworks, go to Washington or St. Louis Thursday night. Because here in God's House not fireworks, but mercy is shown; not anger, but love; not punishment for sins, but forgiveness--forgiveness for you in Christ Jesus...for all of you. Amen.