

“Finding the Deeper Streams”

Rev. David Gregory

October 13th, 2019

18th Sunday after Pentecost



First Reading

from *The Four Elements* by John O'Donohue

God speaks in the depth of the soul. Individual revelation is listening to your thoughts, the voice of the Spirit of your life. Coming into god's presence and listening to God are profoundly imaginative activities. The greatest flow of presence comes from the depths within us. For too long the spiritual quest has been exiled outside to the dry and endless regions of the air element. Now it is the time to engage the water element that signifies the depths within us. It is here that the wells of emotion await us and in freeing the silted sources we may yet flow back into rhythm with ourselves.

Second Reading

1 Kings 19:11-12 from *The Message* by Eugene Peterson

Elijah was told, "Go, stand on the mountain at attention before God. God will pass by." A hurricane wind ripped through the mountains and shattered the rocks before God, but God wasn't to be found in the wind; after the wind an earthquake, but God wasn't in the earthquake; and after the earthquake fire, but God wasn't in the fire; and after the fire a gentle and quiet whisper.

This week I have been reading Rachel Maddow's new book, entitled *Blowout*, which is an incredibly well-researched, clearly written, and generally alarming look at the global reach of the oil and gas industry. I'm glad to be reading it; it explains so much. But I'm troubled by it. My troubled feelings have nothing at all to do with the book itself, or with the author. They have to do with what I've come to think of as the noise of culture, the unmitigated cacophony of our times. It's a lot like being in a windstorm, bombarded by so much air coming at you that your face feels the pressure of it, and it is difficult to stand up. Standing still has never taken so much energy, and I have this strong desire to get to a place of safety and respite.

By now, everyone knows of my strong affection for silence, which is not an unusual thing for someone with Quaker roots. I am at home in silence. I feel nourished by it. It calms and centers me, and when I don't have enough of it in my life, I can feel frazzled, untethered, and anxious.

The Quakers have provided me with the desire for silence, but it is the Celts who are helping me to understand why. The more we explore the water element in John O'Donohue's world, the more we understand the location of our Divine connection. It is one thing to find ourselves on the ground from which we've come, but it is the watery depths—the deepest of streams—which signify the movement of God-energy in our souls. It “frees the silted sources” as he calls them, and allows us to “flow back into rhythm with ourselves.” It is this deep place in the soul where God speaks, and if we're to listen at all, we're going to have to turn the volume down and get ourselves to a place where we can hear.

The biblical story of King Ahab, his queen Jezebel, and their confrontation with the prophet Elijah brings us this deep lesson here. Some nine centuries before the Common Era, at a time when the Kingdom of Israel was divided, the southern kingdom known as Judah retained Jerusalem as its capital and Solomon's temple for itself. The northern kingdom, known as Israel was centered in Samaria, and the people there had a nasty habit of worshipping other gods like Baal. As a prophet, Elijah announced that God was going to bring a drought and a resulting famine which would signify God's displeasure with the kingdom of Israel, and then it proceeded to happen just as he said it would.

Ahab told Elijah to stop troubling Israel with his words and actions. Elijah said to Ahab, “No, you're the one who is troubling Israel with the worship of these other gods.” At the height of the drama there was a showdown between Elijah and the prophets of Baal, after which Elijah had to flee from the wrath of Jezebel, who wanted nothing more than to see Elijah dead. He ended up in a cave on Mount Horeb, deeply troubled, exhausted, and depressed. Feeling alone, thinking that he was the last faithful leaf on the tree, he complained bitterly that all of the work of God in the world had come to nothing. When was God going to stand up and show some force? When was enough going to be enough? Could we not have God swoop down in some dramatic way and fix this mess? And God says to Elijah, “Snap out of it! Come out of the cave and stand on this rock, I have something I want to show you.” And this is where all the flashy things happen. First is a tornado, followed by an earthquake, and then a fire. And we all know that it all came down to a simple Presence, not found in the noise at all—not in the tornado, the earthquake, or the fire, but in a gentle quiet whisper, also known as the still small voice.

I love how it takes this drawn out, convoluted, dramatic story to bring us to a place where John O'Donohue can take us in one simple sentence. These wells of emotion within us—the anger, the anxiety, the depression, or at other times the joy, the laughter, the elation—all begin to free up the silted sources within us, and we flow back into rhythm with ourselves.

Our Celtic journey teaches us that the flow of divine presence comes not from some far-away heaven, but from the very depths within us, from the bottomless wells of emotion and movement that make us fully human. Those wells contain all that exists. They irrigate the very ground of our being and remind us that we do not need a God who lives in a tornado to come down and smash our enemies. We have everything we need.

So, how then are we to live in our current cataclysm? In the very early morning hours of November 9, 2016, on a rather sleepless night in Manhattan, I remember weeping and thinking to myself *Nothing that I care about matters any more. It has all come to nothing. In other words, Woe is me.* I was with a number of colleagues yesterday at the Conference office in San Leandro where we gathered with some others in four Zoom Rooms scattered throughout the region. In the course of the conversation, someone said how grateful they were for all that has happened in the last four years, pointing out, of course, the strength and depth of activism that has grown out of times like these. I was reminded that this is not a time to give up or to give in. It is in times like these we find out what really matters. In times like these we find new and previously untapped sources of energy. In times like these we are forced to dig deeper, to work harder, to be more organized, to be more resourceful, to make things work. In times of trial we learn to find our strength where it really lies. And it all rests in a quiet gentle whisper. Let's turn the volume down so we can listen.



*Listening to the still, small voice
(and finding the light within)*