

Saturday 2nd May



A gentle whisper

Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.

Then a voice said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

[1 Kings 19: 12–13]

I don't know about you, but living alone, in lockdown, is a very strange experience. Going out to lead worship, run messy churches, attend coffee mornings, meetings and pastoral visits is part of my daily life – or at least it was. Now it's online Bible study and streamed worship, conference calls, and trying to give pastoral support from afar. It seems strange because it is: we were not meant to live alone but in community. However, at this time, it is really important that we stay at home and keep our distance in order to save lives.

A passage that I am often drawn to at this time is the story of Elijah. He had a busy life. Before this passage he had defeated the prophets of Baal, then in fear for his life, believing himself all alone, he ran away and hid. It was here, in the solitude and silence, that he encountered God in a powerful way. God wasn't in the earthquake, wind or fire. God was the gentle whisper, the silent presence often drowned out by the noisy, frightening things.

God wasn't the bad things going on all around Elijah. God isn't the virus, the fear or the isolation. God is there – in danger of being drowned out, but still there, calling us. Just as Elijah heard God in the stillness, we can hear God in the calm that isolation brings from the bustle of our lives. God is in the rainbows, in those helping their neighbours, in those picking up the phone, in the applause for our key workers.

*God who speaks in a gentle voice,
Help us to hear you above the noise of this world.
Help us to know you are with us in our fear,
That your wings are over all who are ill or distressed,
That even when we are behind locked doors
We are never alone, for you are with us.
Help us to see you in others,
In kind gestures and loving words,
In rainbows and applause,
In silent solitude, and when we are together once more.
Amen*