

# Silence: Praying in Stillness

## 1 Kings 19:11-13 (NRSV)

11 He said, "Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord, for the Lord is about 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; 12 and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. 13 When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then there came a voice to him that said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

Like Elijah trying to hear God, sometimes it's not the noisy things, but the silences that hold the most. God can speak to us with words, especially in the text of the Bible. God can speak to us with impressive natural wonder or phenomena like thunderstorms. And God can also speak clearly in the midst of silence.

Many religious traditions have a practice of silent meditation. One Christian practice is Centering Prayer. There are lots of resources out there to dig deeply into this practice, but the one thing to keep in mind is that it is a practice. Trying centering prayer once might turn out great! Or it might feel awkward and uncomfortable. But if the idea of a prayer practice based on opening yourself up to hearing from God - a practice of listening rather than speaking - sounds good to you, don't give up! This is perhaps one of the more mystical practices we'll talk about. And mysticism is a lifelong journey, not one we'll accomplish in an afternoon.

## Basics of centering prayer

- This is a practice of centering yourself so that you can be open to experiencing the presence of God
- Set a timer for 10, 15, 20 minutes at first. Go longer if you feel like it! But set the timer so that you can immerse yourself in the experience and not keep checking the clock - your timer will let you know when to come back!
- If you would like, begin with a short reading - perhaps a few verses of a psalm - to set your intentions for this time of prayer. But do not let the words of the text limit your experience. As you open yourself to God, be open to surprises.
- As you enter into the silence, you can find a focus to draw your attention back when it wanders: the flame of a candle, a single word, or even simply your own breath
- Sit comfortably. Meditation can be so relaxing that an overtired, stressed body might slip into sleep. This is fine. You set a timer: you won't miss your next thing. Centering prayer is the practice of resting in the presence of God. This time is a gift, and maybe the gift you need is a short rest.
- Listen. Try not to fill the silence in your mind with thoughts. Draw your attention back to your focus when you catch yourself thinking too much. Don't try to do or think anything. Simply be and feel. If it feels like God is speaking something specific to you - great! If all you feel is the vastness and transcendence of God - also great!
- When your time is up, try to ease your way back into the normal pace of thoughts and life. Maybe read your starting scripture passage again.