

2026 Proper 14 Ordinary 19A – Discerning the Lord in stillness and struggle
A guided meditation on the scriptures
1 Kings 19:9-18 | Matthew 14:22-33

There is such rich imagery and narrative in today's readings, that rather than try to extract some teaching from them, we are instead going to just listen very deeply to the stories, and discern what God may be saying to us in them. I will lead us in a time of guided reflection with the scriptures, and then invite some sharing on what has emerged for us. Let us ask the Holy Spirit now to guide our meditation, and open our ears and hearts to receive what the Word has to say to us today.

(prayer)

Elijah said, "I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts, for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left."

Elijah looks around Israel and perceives that he's the only faithful prophet left among all the people – he lives among those who have "forsaken God's covenant" – deserted the faith that used to be the anchor and identity of the nation.

Can you resonate with the feeling that you are the only one left of a faithful past? How do you feel when you come to church and there's such a small number of people here? Or when you think about who in your family has kept hold of Christian faith over the generations?

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, 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.

The Lord was not in the earthquake, the wind, or the fire. Elijah only went out to stand on the mountain once the noise and tumult had died away and a silence had fallen. The Lord was in the "sheer silence" or as it has sometimes been translated, a "still, small voice" rather than in the splitting of rocks and mountains.

What are some of the places you have expected to see God at work, or to find God, but you couldn't discern God's presence?

What has been your own experience of hearing or recognising God in stillness, silence, or hidden in your ordinary life?

When evening came, [Jesus] was [praying on the mountain] alone...By this time the boat [with his disciples in it], battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea.

Jesus has sent his disciples on ahead, but they've come up against a strong wind, and their boat is being buffeted while they're a long way out to sea. We can see the wind as an image or metaphor for all the things that threaten, frighten, or work against us, as we attempt to follow what Jesus has asked us to do.

What kinds of things make Christian discipleship difficult, tiring, or possibly even hopeless, at the moment – for you or for the church?

What do you think Jesus is thinking and feeling when he watches his friends being battered by the wind? Do you have a sense of him responding the same way to our own struggles?

But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid." Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus.

The disciples don't recognise Jesus at first, and they are terrified by the miraculous power he manifests in crossing the sea towards them. As with Elijah, there is a question of discernment – how does the Lord come to us? Peter's trust is an example of a faithful response to recognising Jesus' divine presence in an unexpected moment.

For you, what are the signs or hallmarks of Christ's presence? How have you learned to identify the activity of God's Spirit, either within or beyond the church?

What might stepping out of the boat and walking towards Jesus in improbable conditions look like for us in today's church?

Which characters or scenarios from today's readings do you most identify with at this time? Elijah? The disciples struggling in the boat? Peter? Jesus? Why do you think this is?

Share with neighbours what most stood out for you from this time of reflection, and how you think it applies to you, or to us at St John's. How are we hearing from God this morning?