

## Encounters with the Lord

A sermon prepared by Revd Sarah Flashman for the Ninth Sunday of Trinity, 9 August 2020  
Ref: 1 Kings 19 v 9-18 and Matthew 14 v 22-33

This week I have been listening to a wonderful treatise on *'The Theology of Joy'*. Joy is not the first gift that comes to mind as we sit with the 1 Kings 19 account of Elijah hiding in the cave. However, recognising a joy that has its source in deliverance as God rescues his people, breaking into their lives with his providence, doesn't seem such a far-off land.

Scripture, as the life changing word of the Lord, time and again meets us at our point of need as we are enlightened with endless accounts that are full of the human condition. Elijah, full of fear, running for his life, quite literally disappears from view as he isolates himself, hiding in a cave, withdrawn, powerless and rather hopeless. However, Psalm 139 v7 reminds us there is nowhere we can go to hide from God's presence: *"Where can I go from your Spirit, where can I flee from your presence"*

*What are you doing in there? Go out and Go Back!*

And so God's word comes to Elijah in his place of isolation, *"What are you doing here Elijah?"* And Elijah responds with the pitiful and fear-infused explanation of all that has recently assailed him. *"Go out!"* says the Lord and gets Elijah's attention with the physical shaking, extreme temperatures and cacophony of wind, earthquake and fire. The greatest power, however, manifests from within - stillness and quiet which causes Elijah to cover his face. Jacob's words come to mind when he also did a runner: *"Surely the Lord is in this place and I was not aware of it"* (Genesis 28 v16). God's presence is imminent and not just transcendent. Once again comes the question, *"What are you doing here?"* Elijah's response is unchanged, but now God says, *"Go back!"*

*"Lead me, O Lord, in your righteousness because of my enemies - make straight your way before me"* says the psalmist (Psalm 5 v8) and here is Elijah's call. He has a task to fulfil, he has encountered God and received a clear directive. God will go ahead of him. And he goes!

In our Matthean account of Jesus walking on the water, we see similar themes of fear when trouble comes and God coming to where the disciples are in that very place. Jesus harnesses the natural forces of nature and calls Peter out *"Come!"* he says, and when it all gets too much, Jesus extends his hand and calls them all onto greater faith.

Isolation and being 'up against it' are the very places God comes to us. He becomes imminent by his Spirit and calls us out. His providence is abundant to all in every detail of our lives. There is nowhere he cannot tread. Let's together be attentive to the work of the Lord in our lives in these challenging days. Let's open ourselves to his extended hand and pray for deepening of our faith and witness and he calls us out. Surely the Lord is in this place and I was not aware of it!