

Communion Meditation
The Monroe Congregational Church, UCC
Rev. Jennifer Gingras
November 7, 2021

1 Kings 19:1-19

Who made the world?
Who made the swan, and the black bear?
Who made the grasshopper?
This grasshopper, I mean -
the one who has flung herself out of the grass,
the one who is eating sugar out of my hand,
who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of up and down -
who is gazing around with her enormous and complicated eyes.
Now she lifts her pale forearms and thoroughly washes her face.
Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away.
I don't know exactly what a prayer is.
I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down
into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass,
how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,
which is what I have been doing all day.
Tell me, what else should I have done?
Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?
Tell me, what is it you plan to do
with your one wild and precious life?

+ Mary Oliver

What I've just shared with you is one of my favorite poems by Mary Oliver called "This Summer Day". The most famous lines of this poem are the last two: they're taped to mirrors and pinned to cork boards and framed in embroidery... they're lines worth remembering.

But the heart of the poem is a couple of lines earlier: "Tell me, what else should I have done?" What else, that is, besides "falling down in the grass, being idle and blessed, strolling through the fields all day." At its heart, this poem is a little revolution to take things a slower and quieter.

But sadly, it seems that it is no longer summer here in Connecticut. And it's gotten a little noisy lately, at least in our public lives. Perhaps a little shouting is necessary in a world filled with so many problems needing to be addressed. But there are days in which the noise seems reckless, anxiety producing, counter-productive. I'm craving a little more peace and quiet. How about you?

What I find so interesting about today's story of Elijah on the run from Queen Jezebel and her loud threats is that for him (this time, anyway), God was not found in the noise. Elijah sort of shouted at God, from his place of feeling sick and tired at being the only faithful person he knew. After all, he had done all that God had called him to do, yet found himself in a cave, hiding from a queen who wanted him dead.

While waiting for God's presence there on Mount Horeb, Elijah listened. A powerful windstorm came and went. An earthquake shook the ground beneath his feet and stopped. A fire consumed the surrounding terrain and then passed by. Each was an awesome, powerful display of God's creative power! But Elijah didn't hear God's voice in any of them. He heard God's voice in a whisper after those powerful displays, not during them.

God's response to Elijah's cry for mercy to just let him die already was met by an angel, offering rest and sustenance and strength for his journey. In other words, God met Elijah's loud despair with a restorative whisper.

On this All Saints Day, I'm remembering and giving thanks for all those gentle, faithful church folks that I've had the pleasure to meet in this and other houses of faith. And I feel profound gratefulness for how these Saints have shaped our mission and ministry over many, many years.

The Monroe Congregational Church is indeed filled with disciples who are faithful, dedicated vessels for God's whispers in the world. Whether that be through serving a meal to those in need, visiting those who are sick or homebound, sending a note of kind encouragement, listening unconditionally, praying for others, joining in on a work day, mentoring our children and youth, or offering a hug of comfort, this congregation is wonderful at being a vessel for God's whispers.

There are people living here in this community that are in need of those who carry God's whispers. Some of us have been pushed to our limit... feeling like we are in the middle of the windstorm of financial crisis, wondering how we

are going to pay the bills, buy the groceries or where the next paycheck is coming from.

Some of us find ourselves in the earthquake of illness. Our lives turned upside down because of a devastating personal diagnosis, or the fragile health of a loved one. The loudness may take the form of a serious diagnosis, or a poor prognosis, or the burden of a chronic pain or mental illness.

Some of us find ourselves in the middle of the firestorm of busyness and striving for professional or personal success. No matter how hard, or long, or smart we work, there is always room to be "better." And when that "better" is reached, there is more "better" to be found. And so it goes, the exhausting pursuit of improvement and progress that never ends and is never enough.

My guess is that most of us here and tuning in from home find ourselves in both situations: at times being the vessels of God's whispers and at other times needing to be on the receiving end.

Episcopal priest and professor Barbara Brown Taylor, preached a sermon about something she called "Sacred Downtime." She suggested that there are many things in life that clutter and disconnect us from God's presence; and that those things separate us from the very source of our being and purpose in the world, and that's not good. It's important to stop, look and listen for God in our day to day lives.

One way we can get there is by observing a regular pattern of silence. She shared some essays from an assignment that she gave her world religion students to spend 20 minutes alone in silence three times a week and then write a three-page reflection on their spiritual experience. Her students wrote about how they connected with the divine in nature, during walks, while eating, and in their interpersonal relationships. Many experienced, what could be called whispers from the Sacred.

In the poem I read a few moments ago, the poet talks about her spiritual experience of holding a grasshopper in her hand on a summer day. She likens it to the closest thing to prayer that she has ever experienced. As she closely observes a grasshopper do what grasshoppers do, she watches with awe and wonder...and because she does, she not only sees the grasshopper, but also its Maker. It is only through taking that time to appreciate God's

creature, the grasshopper, with intent, humility and silence that she is able to connect with God.

In a sometimes loud and shouting world, let's be sure that we each take the time and effort to find that grasshopper, so to speak. When we do, let's get lost in the awe of discovering the sacred in the everyday. By doing that, we will be more attuned to God's whisper. Then we can be vessels of God's love OR we can graciously receive that love when it is offered to us through others. Especially when the world get loud, let's make some room for Sacred Downtime. Amen.