

I've said it time and time again, I'm a big fan of the lectionary, the three year cycle of biblical texts we follow here at Christ the King. I love the lectionary because it keeps us honest, keeps us from going back to our favorite handful of texts we like or find easy to preach on. And I love it because it follows a pattern, and if you stick with it long enough, you start to see that pattern, how it flows from one part of the biblical story to another, how it goes in waves and then begins to repeat itself every three years.

And part of what I have loved about this particular week coming up every three years is that the texts feature the names of our two sons. Elijah in the First Reading, Simon Peter in the gospel. But beyond simply getting to say my children's names out loud in worship, I honestly do love how the themes of this particular Sunday come together—how they each in their own way point to a larger truth about the God we follow, the God we believe in, the God whose hands we place our life in: God Shows Up.

God shows up to Elijah, who thinks he is the only one left who still truly loves, trusts, and follows the LORD. But when God does show up, it's not in the expected places. Elijah does not hear God's voice in the earthquake, wind, or fire. Instead, he encounters God in the “sound of sheer silence” (1 Kings 19:12).

God shows up for Simon Peter, too, while Simon Peter is busy demonstrating that he is all-too-human. He swings wildly between the audacity of demanding that Jesus prove himself and the vulnerability of crying out “save me, Lord.” But in Jesus, God shows up. Even when Simon Peter's faith wavers, Jesus doesn't hesitate; he reaches out to him and pulls him right back in.

God shows up through sheer silence and the calming of storms. Christ comes to us—walking over stormy seas if he has to—and is present with us even in our fears and doubts.

After a week of sable rattling and chest thumping—veiled and not so veiled threats of unleashing nuclear war, from such unlikely corners of the globe as Pyongyang, and Bedminster, New Jersey, the sound of sheer silence is actually a comforting thought. More

than that, though, with Elijah we discover that God is not present in the winds of war-mongering, nor in the earthquake of preemptive strikes, nor in the fire and fury the likes of which the world has never seen. With Elijah, we come to see that God is present in the still, small voice of seasoned diplomats working back channels, in the calming rhetoric of unlikely allies talking bullies down from the ledge, and from the sheer silence of millions of people from many different faith traditions praying for peace.

With Elijah the prophet, can we also hear a word from God that is at once comforting and challenging to us? See, Elijah is **convinced** that he is the only one left that was still following God's ways, the one last true believer. Elijah thought that he had done all he could, and that now even that was not enough. He had presented urgent messages from God, but no one seemed to have listened, no one seems to have cared that much. He had stood up to the king—and more importantly the queen—of Israel, but to no avail. Now he was on the run for his life. He thought he was the only one who “got it.” He felt unappreciated, abandoned, betrayed, and perhaps most importantly alone.

But in that still, small voice, God speaks to Elijah, tells him he is not the only one, tells him that he is not alone, assures him that there are thousands upon thousands still faithful to God and to God's cause. And he challenges him to get up, get over his compassion fatigue and world-weary ways, and to get back to work.

I can relate to Elijah. The feeling of being overwhelmed by things near and far, big things that disrupt our entire world, small things that snowball out of control until they, too are disproportionately large. I relate to the feeling—at times a selfish, self-centered, self important feeling, I confess—of being the only one who gets it, the only one who cares, the only one speaking up or acting out. I relate to Elijah, and I long to hear with him the still, small voice of God saying to me: You're not the only one, not the only one who gets it. You're not the only one who is committed to the cause. You are not alone.

But today, this weekend, these days in general I find myself relating once again to Simon Peter. Simon Peter, the big talker, but one who caves in all too easily when the going gets rough. Simon Peter, who thinks he is being the most faithful of the disciples when he has

the audacity to test Jesus saying, “if it’s really you, I want to come out there and walk on the water, too,” until Jesus calls his bluff. Simon Peter, who wants to do something big, something brave, something showy, but who stumbles, and sinks, but Jesus pulls him back up to the surface.

Still, like Simon Peter, there are times when we must we dare to step out on faith—yes, even we of little faith—to risk the imperfect steps and gamble with the distinct possibility of sinking, of failing miserably, of needing once again to be rescued by our Lord. Like Simon Peter, imperfect as he was, we must rely on the promises made to us in our baptism—that Christ will be with us always—just as we remember the things WE either promised in our baptisms, or affirmed for ourselves in our confirmations.

As we’ll be asked to do again later this morning, in baptism, we renounce the forces of evil that defy God, we renounce the powers of this world that rebel against God and all the ways of sin that draw us from God. We promise, among other things, to proclaim Christ in word and deed, to care for others and the world God made, and work for justice and peace. This is the faith we step out on. And even when we stumble, fall, falter, and yes, begin to sink in our commitment to these faithful promises, God in Jesus Christ pulls us back up, brings us to safety, and challenges us to do it all over again.

Friends, we need to renounce the forces of evil that defy God, the powers of this world that rebel against God, and the sin that draws us from God. Specifically, in light of the events this past weekend when white nationalists, neo-Nazis, racist KKK members, and well-armed open-carry militias joined forces to somehow unite the so-called “alt-right” in Charlottesville, Virginia, I feel called right now to take the risky step of renouncing such evil—the evil of white supremacy, the evil of institutional and systemic racism, the sin of being complacent and even naively benefiting from such evil, and the rebellious attitude that the violence of this past weekend is coming from many sides, many sides.

Here is my prayer confession: borrowed with permission by Pastor Heidi Neumark of Trinity Lutheran Church in New York City. I invite you to consider it yours, too, if you feel so called:

We don't wear white hoods, but we **have** hidden behind white platitudes, white fears and the hood of white supremacy. Good Lord, deliver us.

We don't carry torches of hate, but we **have** failed to keep our grip on the torch of love, wearying of the weight of persistent commitment. Good Lord, deliver us.

We don't shout Nazi slogans, but we **have** failed to speak out and confront the many-headed evil that lurks and lunges against your children. Good Lord, deliver us.

Free us, Good God, to act until your kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.

Amen.

And hear this good news: amid the storms that rage around and within us Jesus says, "Take heart, I am here, do not be afraid." In the midst of a world that at times seems like it is careening out of control—and amid our own more personal experiences of change, risk, failure and success, God reminds us that we are not alone. God's presence in Jesus Christ comes to us across and through the very storms we encounter.

And while we might expect to meet God in the earthquake, fire, or storm, be prepared to be surprised, surprised to hear God's voice speaking to us in the sound of sheer silence, a still small voice calling out to each of us and all of us.

After all, that's why we gather here again today. That's why we gather week after week to seek this calm presence of Christ. That's why we bring our little ones to be washed in the waters of baptism—waters that have carried the faithful through countless storms, calmed by the voice of Jesus, our lord and savior.

We gather to pray, to sing, to hear God's word, and to share in Christ' supper. We gather to listen for that still small voice. We gather to be reminded that even when we falter or fail, Jesus will be there to catch us and pick us back up, ready to give it another try.

Take heart. Christ is here. You are not alone.