

19th Sunday (A)

- How noisy our lives have become - from the moment we wake, our minds are filled with news, emails, text messages, social media, deadlines & endless demands for our attention.
- Even when we finally sit down, many of us instinctively reach for our phones.
- Silence has become something we almost fear.
- Yet beneath all this constant activity there is often a deeper restlessness.
- We worry about our children & grandchildren; we carry grief that never quite leaves us; we wonder about our health, our future, the state of our Church & our world.
- It can feel as though we are living with turmoil around us & uncertainty within us & in the midst of all that distraction & uncertainty, we can ask, "Where is God in all of this?"
- We expect God to break in dramatically, to solve our problems or to remove the storm, but today's readings gently challenge those expectations.
- They reveal a God who is present not in the spectacular, but in the quiet moments that we so easily overlook; a God who does not always calm the storm around us immediately, but who never stops being present within it.
- That is exactly the lesson Elijah has to learn in today's first reading.
- He reached the end of his strength - exhausted, frightened & disappointed, he retreats to the mountain where Moses once encountered God.
- Surely this will be another spectacular revelation; a hurricane tears through the mountain; an earthquake shakes the earth; fire blazes across the landscape - these are all traditional signs of God's power, but God is not in any of them, but instead, God comes in "the sound of sheer silence" or, as another translation beautifully puts it, "a gentle whisper."
- The God Elijah meets is not a God of intimidation but of intimacy.
- The deepest experiences of God usually come quietly: in a moment of forgiveness, in the birth of a child, beside the bed of someone dying, through an unexpected act of kindness, or simply in the stillness when we finally stop trying to control everything.
- God rarely forces the door open; God knocks gently.
- That gentle presence continues in today's Gospel.
- The disciples are caught in a violent storm - the waves batter the boat; the wind is against them; experienced fishermen are terrified.
- Perhaps Matthew is not simply describing a storm on the Sea of Galilee.
- Perhaps he is describing every human life.
- There are storms of grief when someone we love dies; storms of illness that change everything overnight; storms of anxiety that keep us awake long after everyone else has gone to sleep; storms within families, workplaces & communities; storms across our world as wars continue, refugees search for safety, & our common home groans under environmental destruction.

- Many people today ask the same question the disciples asked: "Where is God in all this?" Matthew's answer is profound - Jesus does not prevent the storm; he comes into it - the miracle is not that life suddenly becomes easy; the miracle is that we are not abandoned.
- When Peter steps out of the boat, he does something extraordinary.
- For a few moments he walks on the water, but the instant he focuses only on the wind & waves, fear takes over & he begins to sink.
- Isn't that our experience too?
- Fear has a remarkable ability to narrow our vision.
- It convinces us that the storm is all there is; it blinds us to the presence of Christ already beside us.
- Yet even when Peter's faith collapses, Jesus' faithfulness does not.
- Before Peter can finish crying out, Jesus reaches out.
- The hand of Christ is always quicker than our failure.
- Perhaps that is one of the most comforting truths of the Gospel.
- We are not saved because our faith is perfect.
- We are saved because God's love is steadfast.
- The Church itself has sailed through many storms over 2,000 years.
- Sometimes the storms have come from outside; at other times they have been of our own making.
- There have been moments of scandal, division & failure that have deeply wounded many people, yet Christ never abandons the boat.
- Our task is not to pretend there are no storms, nor to deny the pain they cause; our task is to keep our eyes fixed on Christ & to become signs of his calming presence for others.
- Every one of us can become that "gentle whisper" of God.
- When we listen instead of judge; when we forgive instead of seek revenge; when we welcome instead of exclude; when we stand beside those whose voices are ignored; when we care for creation instead of exploiting it; when we choose compassion over condemnation.
- The world has enough earthquakes, fires & hurricanes of anger, violence & division; what it desperately needs are people whose lives echo the quiet voice of God – And perhaps that is why these two readings belong together.
- Elijah discovers that God is found in gentleness.
- The disciples discover that God is present in the storm; the same Lord who speaks in silence also stretches out his hand over the waves.
- So whatever storm we may be carrying today, we need not be afraid.
- The wind may still blow; the waves may still rise, but beneath the noise of our fears there is another voice - gentle, constant & full of hope.
- It is the voice that has echoed throughout Scripture & throughout every generation of believers: "Take courage. It is I. Do not be afraid."
- And if we can learn to listen for that quiet voice, we may discover that Christ has been in the boat with us all along.