

## **Meditation**

*Sermon Preached by the Rev. Robert A. Arbogast  
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## **Scripture**

*May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart  
be pleasing in your sight, Lord,  
my Rock and my Redeemer"*

Psalm 19:14

*[There] came a gentle whisper.  
When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face  
and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.*

1 Kings 19:12b-13a

## **Sermon**

Today's theme is meditation. But what does it mean to meditate? Well, I think meditating has two parts. The first is to be in the presence of God on purpose. And the second is to listen for the voice of God. To be in the presence of God on purpose, and to listen for the voice of God. That's meditating.

**Now, we are always in the presence of God.** Jonah on the ship and in the fish's belly was in the presence of God. The prodigal son in the far country was in the presence of God. Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin on the moon were in the presence of God. But none of that was on purpose. Armstrong and Aldrin didn't go to the moon so they could be close to God.

Meditation is different. When we meditate, we are in God's presence on purpose. And our purpose is to listen for, and by mercy to hear, the voice of God. When we meditate, we put ourselves in the place of the young boy Samuel. We adopt his attitude and openness. We even claim his words. We say to God, "Speak, Lord. Your servant is listening." That's 1 Samuel 3 (vv. 9-10).

**So we're listening for the voice of God.** But what are we listening to? How does God speak to us? Psalm 19 points the way. The end of that psalm says, "May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart / be pleasing in your sight, LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer" (v. 14).

When the psalmist says, "these words," he's talking about the psalm itself. And when he says, "this meditation," he's talking about his own listening for the voice of

God. He's talking about the listening that laid the foundation for the psalm. Like young Samuel, the psalmist listened and he heard the LORD speak.

**So, what did the psalmist listen to?** How did the psalmist hear the voice of God? To begin with, he listened to the heavens. He stopped. He looked up. He paid attention. He wondered. He imagined. And he heard the heavens declare the glory of God. That's Psalm 19:1.

You see, what God has made reveals God's glory as the Creator and Sustainer of all things. The gravitational balancing act of planets as they spin and as they dance around the sun—it declares the glory of the wisdom of God. The influence of the moon as it keeps the seas in rhythmic motion—it declares the glory of the power of God.

So to meditate is to listen for the voice of God by paying attention to what God has made. Watch a flower bud, and then watch it slowly open. Or notice the song and dance of bees as they buzz from flower to flower, taking up food and spreading the seeds of life. Watch. Notice. Listen. Hear the world declare the glory of God, the Creator and Sustainer of all things.

**The psalmist listened to more than the heavens.** He also listened to the Word of God. He took the time not just to read the Word, but to contemplate it. And he noticed the gifts of God. He saw that, by the Word, God gives refreshment and wisdom and joy and light and reverence and holiness.

And he saw that every word of God is a gift from the LORD, a gift from the covenant God of Abraham and Israel. Again and again, the psalmist repeats the name of God. He says, the LORD, the LORD, the LORD. And in that name, we can hear the echo of all the great biblical stories that gave the psalmist and his people their identity.

So to meditate is to contemplate the Word of God. To read. To stop. To think. To wonder. To listen. And to do it always keeping in mind the name of God, to do it always keeping in mind the name Jesus. "Jesus," the name above all names. "Jesus," the name that makes us who we are, each of us and all of us together.

And when we meditate on the Word, we don't worry about reading verse after verse, chapter after chapter. It's not about the quantity of our reading. It's about the object of our attention. Which brings us to the reading from 1 Kings 19.

**Here's what's going on in 1 Kings 19.** The prophet Elijah is running scared. Because Ahab and Jezebel are out for blood, his blood. So Elijah has fled to Horeb, the Mountain of God. The prophet is desperate. He could use some encouragement. He could use some time in the presence of God. And while the prophet waits, the LORD in mercy passes by.

But it's a wonder that Elijah even noticed. You see, first there was a wind, a wind strong enough to move pieces of the mountain around. But the LORD wasn't in the

wind. Then there was an earthquake. But the LORD wasn't in the earthquake. Then there was a fire. But the LORD wasn't in the fire. Finally there was a gentle whisper. And the LORD was there. And Elijah heard the voice of the LORD in that whisper.

**So now we know what to do.** If we want to hear the voice of God, then we need to find a quiet place, a quiet time, and to listen for God there. What a brilliant idea! But easier said than done, isn't it?

Quiet is one of the hardest things to come by in prison. There's always noise. There are always people. And there are always restrictions. You can't go where you want when you want. So how can you have a quiet space where you can hear the voice of God?

I know some of you make heroic efforts. You get up in the middle of the night, and you listen for God in the midst of snores and other night sounds. God bless you in that! Keep it up as long as God gives you the endurance. But I think there must be another way. And I think so because of Elijah's story.

**You see, I've always heard the story this way.** There was a destructive wind. But the LORD wasn't in the wind. Then the wind stopped, and there was an earthquake. But the LORD wasn't in the earthquake. Then the earthquake stopped, and there was a fire. But the LORD wasn't in the fire. Then the fire stopped, and there was a whisper. And the LORD was in the whisper.

Well, here's the thing. There's nothing in the story that says any of those events stopped. So we can just as easily read the story this way: There was a wind howling and shrieking, but the LORD wasn't in the wind. And while the wind was still howling, the earth started chattering and shaking. But the LORD wasn't in the earthquake or in the wind. And while the wind was still howling and the earth was still chattering, a fire started to blaze and roar. But the LORD wasn't in the fire or in the earthquake or in the wind.

But while the wind was still howling and the earth was still chattering and the fire was still roaring, there came a voice. It was a silent voice. And the LORD was there. And in the midst of all the howling and chattering and roaring, the prophet somehow heard the silent voice of God.

**What does that mean?** It means—and we know this, don't we?—it means that the Lord is present and the Lord speaks even when we can't find a quiet time or place. It means no matter where we are and no matter what's going on around us, we can say, "Speak, Lord. Your servant is listening." That's the heart of meditation.

There's so much we can't control. We can't create an ideal environment for meditation. We can't quiet all the noises around us. We can't even quiet all the noises in

our heads. But we can pray, "Lord Jesus, speak to me. I'm listening. I'm listening, and I want to hear your voice." That's where meditation begins.

And try not to be discouraged by how hard it is. Try not to be discouraged by all the restrictions and all the people and all the noise. Keep watching and keep noticing. Keep reading and keep wondering. Above all, keep listening. And like Elijah, in the middle of all the noise, you may hear the silent voice of God.

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Glory and thanks be to God:  
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

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