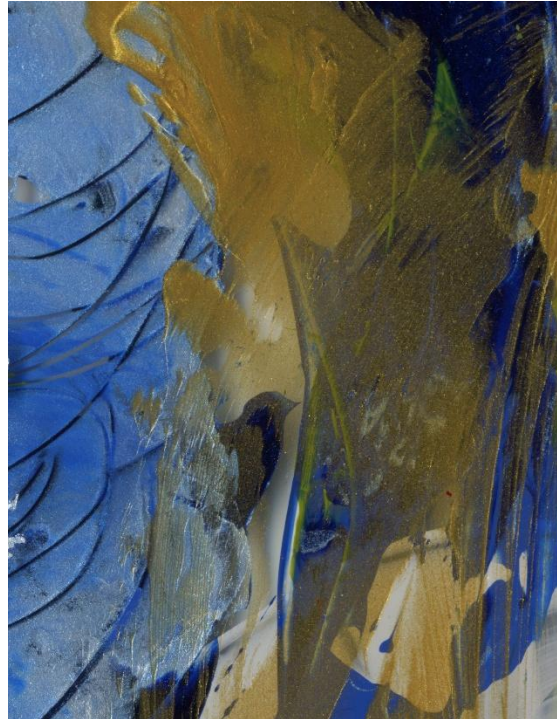


Sermon Preached at St Mark's Fitzroy in the Diocese of Melbourne

Sunday 8 August 2026

1 Kings 19:9-13; Psalm 34:2-9; Romans 9:1-5; Matthew 14:22-33

Dr Murray Harvey, Bishop of Grafton



Even when we are afraid © Jan Richardson. janrichardson.com. Used under licence.

Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, “Lord, save me!”

As we listen to today's Gospel reading, we can each relate to the fear expressed by Peter and the other disciples, out on the stormy sea.

Battered by waves and far from the land.

Generations of preachers have drawn connections between these frightening conditions and the kinds of uncertainties, storms and challenges we face in our own lives.

Each of us could recount occasions when it has felt as if we were in a small rocky boat out on a stormy sea.

Today is no different: we face the challenges of unsettling world events.

Apparently we live in what experts call a polycrisis - a situation where multiple, distinct global crises (such as economic, environmental, and geopolitical) occur simultaneously and interact in ways that amplify each other. The combined impact of these compounding crises is far more severe than the sum of their individual parts.

To make it worse, we live in the age of rage, where division sells, and populist politicians trade in hate, grievance and fear.

Even in our own Anglican world, we face the beginning of General Synod this evening; we acknowledge that our church is sadly rocked by ongoing division and conflict over contentious issues, and much of that will sadly play out over the coming days.

Like Peter, we step out cautiously and hesitatingly, cognisant of the storms around us, but hopeful that our faith will sustain us.

But the storm rages, as do the doubts and we become aware of new, previously unnoticed dangers. We find ourselves in a new place, with new dangers, in uncharted, unfamiliar territory. We can begin to falter.

Jesus doesn't always seem to be present out on the sea, or even a fellow passenger in our particular boat.

In my younger days I was a lifesaver. I can remember many rescues out in the rough surf of the Gold Coast, most of which went according to plan, but others where I was punched, slapped, or kicked by a panicking, drowning person. Sometimes we are each that person in our panic and disbelief.

In our Old Testament reading today, Elijah meets God at Horeb.

While perhaps not panicking as such, Elijah is despondent, anxious, despairing and frustrated. Previous approaches and certainties are far behind him. Righteous confidence won't help him now. Elijah is not in a storm at sea, but he clings to the cave while God unleashes natural forces far beyond anything Elijah has seen or heard. The text announces that God is passing by. The expected natural escorts - wind, earthquake and fire - are present.

In the Elijah narrative - which stretches well beyond our Old Testament reading today - God reaches out to Elijah in different ways.

The "messenger of Yahweh" visits him twice ([1 Kings 19:5-7](#)). The Hebrew word is מַלְאָךְ (malak), which means "messenger."

God, therefore, visits, touches, feeds, and consoles Elijah in the wilderness.

At the mountain of God, God once more visits Elijah, only this time he is called "the word of Yahweh" ([1 Kings 19:9](#)).

So he first appears to Elijah as the Messenger, next as the Word, and then as the Voice of God.

Not in the Wind, Earthquake, or Fire - we are told that "the LORD was not in [these]." but in the Voice.

Well, then, what was he in? The Hebrew is *qol d'mamah daqqah*. A *qol* is a sound or voice. The word *d'mamah* means calm or silent. And *daqqah* means thin or small. Thus, various translations render it as a "still small voice" (KJV), "a gentle whisper" (NIV), "the sound of a low whisper" (ESV), or "the sound of minute stillness" (R. Alter).

And after the fire - a soft, murmuring sound (qol dmamah daqah, v. 12).

The "still, small voice."

This translation from the King James Bible is regarded as the better English versions.

Simon and Garfunkel's the *sound of silence* is close, but not close enough.

Jewish scholars say that *qol* is a silent voice rather than an audible sound. And that is what Elijah hears: a voice without sound. A prayer?

Jewish scholars prefer a grammatically strict translation: the "voice of fragile silence."

This profound biblical account highlights several key themes:

- The Nature of Revelation: God's presence is not always found in loud, spectacular, or destructive events. Instead, He often communicates in quiet, personal, and gentle ways.
- Comfort in Despair: Elijah was exhausted and fearful for his life after fleeing from Queen Jezebel. The quiet whisper was a personal, intimate encounter designed to soothe his troubled spirit rather than overwhelm him with power.
- Reassurance and Direction: After the gentle voice, God spoke to Elijah, asking what he was doing there, and then gave him the renewed direction and courage he needed to continue his prophetic mission.

The passage serves as an enduring reminder that divine presence and guidance can be experienced in stillness and quiet.

Surprisingly though God's message to Elijah is not an *answer*, but a *question*. A question God had asked him before, and that he must confront again. Why are you here Elijah? (v.13). A vocational question that it is healthy to ask ourselves from time to time.

From this desert silence come words that Elijah hears with his inner ear. A prayer perhaps. The voice asks, "*ma lekha po*, Elijah?" Literally, "What is for you here, Elijah?"

What is for you here, Elijah, in the desert, in this uncomfortable place? Who are you, *here*? Not "who were you in that place of safety and comfort" but "who are you now that you are at the edge"? Now you've taken the risk? What is for you *here*?

What is here for you in the desert where your righteous anger, so justifiable, gets you nothing? And what is here for you on Mt. Sinai, Elijah, when the wind, earthquake and fire bring no revelation?

Who are you in the desert, where your previous understanding of how God communicates with you no longer applies; where your past experience misleads you; where your great accomplishments will not help you?

Who are you Elijah, here, in the desert?

If we stop to listen in the stillness, this is a question any of us can hear, anytime.

Who am I, when my achievements, titles and bank account are left behind?

When we come to the end of our energy, efforts and resources, and let the storm rage around us, and wait humbly on God. When the waves are overwhelming us who are we and what are we doing here?

In the midst of our current polycrisis, who am I? Who are you? Who are we here?

When all that we held dear, or assumed as a rational, ordered way of life, is overturned. When racism, formerly unacceptable, is now normalised and tolerated (or at least not called out)

When empathy, formerly seen as a virtue, is now regarded as a sin or as weakness

When hatred is normalised

When disinformation (formerly called lies) is not only tolerated and unchallenged, but regularly used as a tool by media and politicians

Who are we *here*? Not who *were* we when all was safe and certain, back in some “Golden Era” – but who are we here and now?

If racism, lies, hatred are not me, if they’re not you, then what are you and I doing about it? What is our vocation here?

When circumstances have led us to a new and vulnerable place and everything nonessential has been shed, who am I?"

Prophecy has changed for Elijah. No more dramatic miracles, no more thunderbolts and earthquakes. No Ten Commandments either. Elijah must now learn his role-model Moses' greatest virtue - humility. The zealous warrior is given his most difficult mission, to confront his pride and see himself as he truly is in this new uncomfortable place.

So too for you and me. We cling to God's still, small voice.

God's voice in the silence of our prayer.

Silence in which God has never been so close. Yet as he did for Elijah he might offer up a question, not always an answer, who are you here and what is for you to do here. Profound vocational questions that challenge us to remember who and whose we are.

May we learn to hear, living as listeners for God's voice – with humble hearts – not in self righteous posturing, but humbly seeking God's will for us in this new place.

READINGS ONLY

Matt. 14:22 Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. ²³ And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, ²⁴ but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land,^a for the wind was against them. ²⁵ And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea. ²⁶ But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear. ²⁷ But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."

Matt. 14:28 Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." ²⁹ He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. ³⁰ But when he noticed the strong wind,^a he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" ³¹ Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" ³² When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. ³³ And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

1 Kgs 19:9-13

Then the word of the LORD came to him, saying, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" ¹⁰ ~~He answered, "I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away."~~

Elijah Meets God at Horeb

1Kings 19:11 He said, "Go out and stand on the mountain before the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by." Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake; ¹² and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. ¹³ When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then there came a voice to him that said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

Psalm 34:2-9

² My soul makes its boast in the LORD;
let the humble hear and be glad.
³ O magnify the LORD with me,
and let us exalt his name together.

Psa. 34:4 I sought the LORD, and he answered me,
and delivered me from all my fears.

- 5 Look to him, and be radiant;
so your^a faces shall never be ashamed.
- 6 This poor soul cried, and was heard by the LORD,
and was saved from every trouble.
- 7 The angel of the LORD encamps
around those who fear him, and delivers them.
- 8 O taste and see that the LORD is good;
happy are those who take refuge in him.
- 9 O fear the LORD, you his holy ones,
for those who fear him have no want.

Rom. 9:1 I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience confirms it by the Holy Spirit—
² I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. ³ For I could wish that I myself were accursed
and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people,^a my kindred according to the flesh. ⁴ They are
Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship,
and the promises; ⁵ to them belong the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, comes the
Messiah,^a who is over all, God blessed forever.^b Amen.