

## “Why are you here?”

8/9/20

These days I simultaneously feel like I’m living in a cave, with.... what is this? Our 1,000 month of quarantine.... the same encapsulated , somewhat stifling way of doing life - socially distanced, masked - mostly virtual, little disruption.... and I also paradoxically feel like I’m out in the wild - at the mercy of all the known & unknown forces of our world.. The breaking and rumbling divisions, the cracking of our unjust systems and structures and - the whirlwind of emotions that go along with that- of grief, pain, frustration.. anxiety.

And in both - whether it’s the cave or out in the wild forces of my day - I recently have been asking myself this question, “Why am I here?” Like what am I doing here? Why now? Why here? Why this place, this time, this world, this context? Not in a judgy-self-deprecating way.... But in a way that helps me orient to God, my purpose, my passions - harness my vision. It’s a deeply internal question, but a very active question.

The spiritual practice that I’m going to invite you into this morning - is one that poses this very same question to you, “**Why are you here?**” And I’ll walk us through that in just a second.

The practice is anchored in the story of the prophet Elijah. Where we see his life, is a life that exhibits his love for God, where he continually challenges corrupt leadership. He fought with such zeal and focus against the injustices around him - and yet despite his moments of progress and victory - he still finds himself surrounded by the same evils he had tried so hard to defeat. His life is being threatened, and he’s losing capacity and courage to stay in it.

So he flees - seeking the presence of God. And he goes to Mt. Horeb/the mountain of God.. the same mountain where Moses encountered God, receiving the 10 commandments, **in fire, smoke, earthquake, thundering, and billowing clouds.**

And when he gets there **9** he spends the night in a cave.

Where God’s word came to him and asked him this very question, “**Why are you here, Elijah?**”

**10** And Elijah says, “I love you so much God, I’m so passionate for you.”... “but the Israelites have abandoned your covenant - they’ve torn down your altars, and they’ve

done such harm , they murdered your prophets with the sword..... And I am done, I'm the only one left, facing all this alone..."

**11** The Lord said, "Go out and stand at the mountain before the Lord. The Lord is passing by." A very strong wind tore through the mountains and broke apart the stones before the Lord. But the Lord wasn't in the wind. Nor was the Lord in the earthquake or the fire that passed by after. But after the fire, there was a sound. Thin. Quiet. [A whisper.]**13** When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his coat. He went out and stood at the cave's entrance. He recognized it - it was the same sound of God that he had met with in the cave and the **voice came to him and said - again - "Why are you here, Elijah?"**

**14** And he answers in the exact same way as he did before.

**And god says, good "Go - go back the way you came.."**

It's not quite the Moses moment Elijah might have been hoping for with God - God didn't speak out of a billowy cloud and didn't hand over the 10 Commandments version 2.0 to Elijah to right the wrongs of the day.

Instead he acclimates Elijah to his presence in a cave like atmosphere and in the wilds of the day by asking, "Why are you here?" "Why are you here, Elijah?" A deep, deep question that refines his vision, reminds him of who he is, who he's loved by, and where he needs to be. An anchor, a refueling and a direction all in one..

## **PRACTICE ||**

So this morning I ask you to orient yourself to God right now, whatever that looks like for you. Why don't you start with a good couple of big breaths in and out.

1. Why don't you bring to mind - the ways in which you - like Elijah, feel done. Out of capacity. Frustrated. Defeated. Bereft of courage. Bereft of vision.
2. And imagine yourself in a known, safe space with God. In the shelter of God right now. God is between you and the one entrance/exit in the cave - buffering you from harm, protecting you. All of the power, strength and force you know of God - is on full display... used to invite you - welcome you - love you... and where God
3. Tenderly ask you this question, ,

**"Why are you here?"**

Answer this question now - as honestly as you can. As best you can receive this as an open invitational question - rather than a harsh judgement.

As you think about your answer, let me give you Elijah's template - try starting with:

... Declaration of your love for God. (Tell God what you love about God. ).

...Tell God what you are upset with/frustrated by/broken-hearted about - things you have been putting your energy into - but haven't seen change in. This could be relationships, to family, to yourself, your school, your neighbors - society.

... And your current state of being. (Elijah felt alone, like he was the only facing the challenges, the struggle). What are you feeling?

Remember you are in this place of shelter with God as you are telling GOD this ..

Feel the tenderness.. The safety. The love. The goodness.

As much as you can - enter that place of comfort, notice where in your body you might release, soften. Maybe in your jaw, or shoulders, lower back. Let the power of God's love bring release to your whole being.

Take a deep breath in and out...

**\*\***Now imagine yourself stepping out of that cave - into the world, with the roaring forces of the day -abounding. The fires and trembles and quaking and splintering noise around you. **\***Maybe you had a moment like this this week that you can step back into...

And let God ask you that same question as you stand in the fullness of your life?

**Why are you here?**

Answer in the exact same way you did - just a couple seconds ago. This time keep your eyes open - look at your surroundings.

And let your body remind you - of what it felt just a few seconds ago with God in the cave. Comfort, a powerful love that hears you and believes your frustration... and reminds you that you are not alone.

And let the force of that love of God for you - that belief in you, be what you feel above all else. A force that stills the whirlwind inside of you - refines your passions and hopes for this world - and promises to guide you through. God says, "Go - go back the way you came..." - now - with the power of the heavenly forces in your own back pocket.

Ask yourself when you wake each morning this stilling - anchoring question, "Why am I here?" And ask yourself again at any point in your day where you feel the threat of forces bearing down on your being, this bold and powerful question, "Why am I here?"

Prayer:

Oh God, this morning I remember Howard Thurman's words, that "*Whatever the tensions and the stresses of a particular day may be, there is always lurking close at hand the trailing beauty of forgotten joy or unremembered peace.*"

Help us to see this God - the beauty, the vision of a world that we fight so hard to hold in the forefront of our imagination .. Help us to keep going - to keep our hearts up with courage and energy. Help us to remember the moments in our days where you pierce through with peace, joy, and power. And help us to still and to actively rest for the work that is ahead.

AMen.