

LENT 2023
LISTEN
ZION UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST



Wednesday Lenten Worship
Finding Your Cave: Listening Spaces

Prelude

Given For You

Gathering—Come and rest. Come and listen. Lay the fullness of your lives before the Maker.

Music Refrain: Come and Find the Quiet Center, #477, verse 1
Come and find the quiet center in the crowded life we lead,
Find the room for hope to enter, find the frame where we are freed:
Clear the chaos and the clutter, clear our eyes, that we may see
All the things that really matter, be at peace, and simply be.

In our scripture reading for this week, we find the prophet Elijah out in the wilderness in a cave listening. You see, Elijah fled into the wilderness because his life was being threatened, and he was at the point where he was ready to give up because the conflict he faced was overwhelming. At just the right time, an angel appeared to him, offering him food and drink to revive him. It gives him enough sustenance to survive 40 days and 40 nights in the wilderness on mount Horeb. On the mountain he finds a cave, and in that cave he waits for the Lord to appear. In the challenging times of our lives and in the peaceful ones, we all need a special place to go to listen for God. Tonight, we are making holy space in our homes so we can listen for God's still, small voice.

Music Refrain: Come and Find the Quiet Center, #477, verse 2
Silence is a friend who claims us, cools the heat and slows the pace,
God it is who speaks and names us, knows our being, touches base,
Making space within our thinking, lifting shades to show the sun,
Raising courage when we're shrinking, finding scope for faith begun.

Examen—In the season of Lent, we especially focus on being honest with God and with ourselves, facing our brokenness and receiving God’s grace. Each Wednesday we will engage the spiritual practice of examen as we reflect honestly on our lives.

For that which, then, I thought was right...have mercy, God. *[pause]*

For that which, now, I regret...forgive me, God. *[pause]*

For that which, hence, I know not what to do...guide me, God. *[pause]*

Pastor: Come and rest, come and listen. Know that grace, forgiveness and guidance are available to you at each and every moment that we turn to receive them. Thanks be to God.

Listening—This Lent we are practicing listening, pausing for a few moments in our worship for silence. Silence is hard if we’re not used to it. So often we have the TV on in the background or turn up the radio when we’re driving. Silence can be healing. Silence can be clarifying. Let’s practice a little silence, and during these Wednesday service, you’ll have some images to observe during our silence.

Silence

We Hear God’s Word

1 Kings 19:9a, 11-13a (NRSV)

The scripture in this series will be done in an abridged “lectio divina” format—which means “divine reading.” We will hear the scripture read once and then we will let that resonate for a bit. Think about what words or phrases popped out for you in the reading? After a few moments, we will hear the scripture read again.

At that place [Elijah] came to a cave, and spent the night there...[The word of the Lord came to him and] 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; and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. 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...

Spirituality in Practice

“Finding Your Cave: Listening Spaces”

Sunday, we talked about how Elijah needed to be out in the wilderness in that cave in order to listen for the still small voice of God. In that cave there were none of those everyday distractions, though the wind and the earthquake and the fire certainly grabbed his attention. Out in the wilderness though, he was able to get away from the turmoil he was facing, to get enough breathing room that he could find clarity in his call, in the plans that God had in store for him. He could be in that posture of being open to the moving of God's spirit.

It's great when we can get out and have a change of scenery, to go to a park or a favorite quiet spot, to get away for a while on a trip and really mix it up. However, that's not always possible or convenient or practical, especially, if you want space for daily listening.

Tonight, or whenever you are worshipping with us, you are invited to find a place in your home that can be your cave or your listening post for this season of Lent. After all, God meets us where we are, and we can't all be out in the wilderness. It could be that you already have a place where you go to study and pray, or maybe you don't. Maybe you have your favorite comfy chair that could be this space for you, or perhaps there is that chair you only use for special occasions that could use a little extra love. It could be you have desk that would be conducive to listening or your kitchen table. Wherever it is, whatever it is, find a space that can be your cave.

Take a look at that space. You can pause this video (or step away from this mailing) and go to that space. If you're watching on a phone or laptop, take your device to it. Consider for a moment the memories this space holds. Are they good or bad? Get a feel for this space. Maybe it's not where you want to spend time every day for the next 40 days. You can always choose a different space. What do you appreciate about this space? How does it feel or smell? Is it comfy? What's the light like around it? Is there anything in this space that you might want to clear away so there's not as much distraction? It could be that you thrive in chaos with all your treasures around you. That's totally fine. Let's be real, life does come with its messiness, after all and that is o.k. Do you think you could listen here?

If you have your space picked out, I'd like to join together blessing it, in marking it as sacred for this season. If you haven't figured out a good fit yet, you can

always come back to this once you've decided on what that space will be, but I want us to bless this space together. Let's bless this space...

Ever-present God, you are with us in the wilderness and in the comfort of our homes. Your presence is as expansive as the universe and as near as our very breath. This Lent we commit ourselves to listening for your still small voice. May this particular space become a listening post. May it be as that cave was for Elijah. Make sacred this space by your presence and make open our hearts to your call. Thank you for meeting us exactly where we are, here on this holy ground. Amen.

Hymn

Holy Ground, 654 (2x)

Benediction— As you depart this space we've created together in our worship and enter the wilderness of the world, know that God is with you. [We can't always be in that listening cave, but] whatever may come, let God be your safe place to go and your soft place to land. Amen.+

Postlude

Wayfaring Stranger