

Christmas Eve Meditation 2021  
1 Kings 19:11-12

1Kings 19:11-12 (NRSV)

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.

Our worship service on Christmas Eve at 1<sup>st</sup> Pres. always inspires me,  
and I am grateful to each of **you** for being here to share this,  
because by your presence you make our worship better.

**The familiar Bible passages with our favorite Christmas music  
boldly proclaim both the wonder and the grace of our Lord God...**  
... and all of it carries me back to good memories of Christmases past,  
of special people, meaningful experiences and pleasant times,  
often even more precious than I realized at the time.

**This is a wonderful night, so holy & joyful, so sacred & meaningful,  
a precious treasure to ponder, its mystery to drink in deeply  
and allow God's grace & hope to flow into our hearts & lives...**

**... as together we are drawn into the very presence and peace of God...**

... for each time I hear the Christmas story repeated again,  
**I marvel at the wonder of our infinitely wise and powerful God,  
who loves us so deeply, that he came to us, the Christ-child.**

I think this year I especially need this time and place of worship,  
for there is a darkness of despair and uncertainty in our world.

We need to hear a welcome word of hope, strength and reassurance,  
for these past months have been especially difficult for many.  
**These aren't the easiest of times or circumstances in which to live.**

Clearly something is wrong, terribly destructive and unhealthy,  
with pervasive and polarizing distrust, viciousness and anxiety,  
and a disquieting sense of darkness, despair and divisiveness.

For some there's also a darkness much closer to home & more personal,  
of health and emotional issues, employment & financial concerns,  
of failed and broken relationships or missing a dear loved one.

And so we are here to be encouraged & reassured again of God's grace,  
that yes God is with us, and at work in our world, in our lives,  
shining light into our dark places with healing for the wounded...  
**... because the noise of the storms around us are not the whole story.**

When Kathy and I lived in NC, our home was 6 houses up from the bay,  
and one year Hurricane Bertha made landfall through our community.  
It was the first time I'd ever had the experience  
of a hurricane while living that close to the ocean.

By early afternoon the storm and waves were starting to intensify  
with powerful winds rippling shingles and vents off nearby roofs.

I saw huge trees being bent, and many would eventually be uprooted.

All our porch windows & outside-doors were shattered & blew away.  
Gusts of wind became an incessant whistling and frightful roar  
that seemed to go on forever as we huddled together in the dark.

Toward evening, almost suddenly, the winds weakened and died down  
until there was a quiet calm & still, in fact the sun even came out.

We joined our neighbors out in the street surveying the damage,  
and were told that it was the eye of storm passing overhead.

After a few minutes of blissful respite and almost serene stillness  
the storm picked back up as the rest of the hurricane swept through.  
That remarkable calm stillness while the eye of the storm passed by  
reminds me of the verses about the prophet Elijah in 1 Kings 19.

It was a time when Elijah was feeling very discouraged and weary.

The powerful and evil Queen Jezebel had sworn to kill Elijah,  
so in his fear, distress, panic and trepidation,  
he'd fled and was hiding in the darkness of a cave.

Then God tells Elijah to stand and look out from the mouth of the cave,  
where overlooking the valley he watches a powerful & terrible storm.  
He sees a fierce wind breaking rocks and the mountains around him,  
while an earthquake shakes the land amid lightening and fire.

It's a terrifying display of great power & strong-crushing forces.  
Then it all stops. All is quiet and there's nothing but a stillness  
that's described in the text as a *sheer silence* or a thin-gentle quiet.

The point is, God isn't always in the loud, impressive and obvious ...  
... but sometimes, **it's in the quiet and reflective**  
**that we can hear and discern best the voice of God.**

**Sometimes in the glitz and busy razzle-dazzle of this world,**  
we don't recognize in the quiet and simple, and unadorned,  
that which is truly meaningful, blessed and significant.

Sometimes we can get so caught up, stressed, rushed and preoccupied  
that we miss it when God is speaking, distracted from what matters.

**We notice the fearful wind, the earthquake and fire,**  
**but miss it, when God speaks in the sheer silence...**

... so we may struggle to trust and believe how very much God loves us,  
with grace enough to come down into this world to heal and save us,  
**when in Christ, God chose to move into our neighborhood.**

When we are aware and accept God's grace, hope and promise **for us,**  
that truth of God's unrelenting love and desire to bless us,  
**that same grace has the power to grow, heal & transform us.**

Maybe the Lord brought you here to hit the pause button of your life,  
and reflect on where your life is going, and what is truly  
happening with your relationships, and your walk with God.

In many ways, we've known too much darkness, dread & disappointment,  
and so we light candles on Christmas eve tonight  
to help remind us of God's promises and hope ---  
- the light that shines into our every darkness and secret place,  
the light of hope that keeps us from giving up in broken despair-

- as we're told in Isaiah 9:2 and John 1:5

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep  
darkness-- on them light has shined. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not  
overcome it.

That Light is our hope and God's promise that still shines  
despite the destructive storms and forces of this world.

**The Light of Jesus comes as a powerful promise of enduring hope,  
as the One whose life and mission demonstrated the amazing truth,  
that we are indeed loved & precious and that we do matter to God...**

**... that we actually can have a living relationship with the Lord,  
that there is real possibility for a fresh start & power to change...  
... and that the amazing truth of that Light can redirect  
how we perceive our challenges and live out our lives.**

**Jesus came as the light of God, lovingly wrapped in human flesh,  
here to reveal the awesome depth of God's love, mercy & grace.**

Christmas eve is about that Light, God's grace reaching out to us,  
to the discouraged and wounded, to the hurting and broken-hearted,  
with healing compassion and comfort to guide us back home again.

**Christmas eve is a uniquely special place to meet Christ the Lord,  
a good place to be found, welcomed and invited by Jesus to follow.**

In a few moments, we will light our candles as **symbol** and **reminder**--  
- **a symbol** of Jesus' birth, the Light of the world,  
- **a reminder** of the promise and hope that Jesus brings...

... he described in John 8:12,

"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the  
light of life."

- that is the light of hope and endless new possibilities,  
**and a peace far greater than even our worst fear or anxiety...**

**... for as we light our candles together as a community of faith,  
and when the light is shared, passed from one person to another  
the world we share becomes a brighter and more hopeful place.**

Tonight, by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit,  
let the words of the story we've heard so many times  
proclaim God's promise and truth in a fresh new way...

... **and may that Light shine in our hearts, tonight and always,**  
**that we may also faithfully reflect that Light out to others,**

For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as  
children of light— (Eph. 5:8)