

We arrived at our destination to find the streets filled with school age kids going from store to store. We wondered what was going on. Yes, it was school vacation but so many parents and kids shopping - surely not back to school in April! We discovered the local Chamber of Commerce was having a Scavenger Hunt. The kids picked up a list of things to be found in the various businesses and then headed to the stores to find them. It was a great idea to get people in the community and stores, the candy and ice cream shops seemed most popular. As I thought about this I wondered, Where would you(I) go if on the list there was: GOD. Where would you begin your search?

Elijah was running away. He and God had just secured a victory over the five hundred (500) prophets of Baal but in doing so he had upset the “powers that be,” Jezebel. Her words were that within twenty-four hours Elijah too, would be dead (19:4). Elijah’s solution was to run away. He wants to get as far away from the situation as he can. Strengthened, he ran for 40 days and 40 nights to Mt. Horeb (19:8). Exhausted he entered a cave and rested for the night. Where is God? He may have been depressed, “I am the only one left...(19:10).

The question comes in the morning, “What are you doing here?” Why are you at Sinai, the mountain of God (Horeb and Sinai are the same mountain). He stands in the door of the cave and waits for God. There was a strong wind, but God was not in the wind. There was an earthquake, but God was not in the earthquake. There was a fire, but God was not in the fire. All of these are images of God coming to Sinai. In Exodus the mountain trembled at God’s presence. Isaiah writes about God’s coming, “...*the Lord Almighty will come with thunder and earthquake and great noise, with windstorm and tempest and flames of devouring fire*” (Is. 29:). But God was not there. The day turned quiet. One translations says, “sheer quiet.” Others try to describe the moment: “a gentle whisper”, “a quiet and gentle whisper”, or “a still small voice.” It was in the gentle quietness that God came. God came in an unexpected way to Elijah. The Word was simple, “Go back...”

The Galatians were struggling with the Law and freedom in Christ. Legalism had been a failure. The way of Law had been tried. It only led to more laws. For example, what does it mean to work on the Sabbath? The definition of work produced more laws to be followed. The more and more the Law was defined the harder it became to keep it. We tried legalism and could not even keep the wider points of the Law. It failed and yet there are still many who want it back. We know we can keep it this time.

Christ came to do away with the Law. Christ came to move us from legalism to grace. Christ offers a “gentle whisper” — God loves you.

We are different now, Paul writes - we are now one in Christ. This was a time when differences were important. Remember the benefits Paul had because he was a Roman citizen. There were slaves and free, male and female, Jew and Greek and each of these differences played a part in their society. But now, in Christ all of these differences are gone. Christ has come and made it possible for us to be One with God and with one another. In Christ the whole Law has been fulfilled and in Christ we see and find God.

Where do we find God? I would say, “in the actions of those who follow him.” We find God with those who are standing with those outside the circles and inviting those on the outside in and letting them in. With those who seek to feed the hungry and clothe the naked. With those who believe that God loves the whole world. With those who stand not in loud rhetoric but in

the gentle whisper of love. With those who seek to release others from the Law because the Law is no longer valid or necessary.

Now, there are those who argue that the Law is necessary. Without the Law we would have chaos. Yet, if we are one in Christ and if we are all equal before God and if love rules then there is no longer any need for the Law. If we follow the path of Christ and love, then the law will not be needed. Paul says “now that faith has come...”

We live in a world of misleading prophets. We hear, “This is God’s judgment on...” You can fill in the blank with almost any situation. From the tragedy in Orlando, to the heat in the south to yesterday’s violent storms in our area — someone will say that is God’s judgment on... This is God and they celebrate.

But, this is not God. This is not how God responds. If this is how God responds then there would have been no gentle whisper on a still, quiet night in a town called Bethlehem. There in the gentle cry of a new-born son, God came—a gentle whisper of love. It was not in the wind, the earthquake or fire but in a gentle whisper of love. A whisper that the angels saw and told the story to a group of sleepy shepherds on a hillside, who visited the child and then began to share the story with everyone who would listen. They had just seen the gentle whisper of God’s love. This was not law but grace. This was not judgment but love. This was God and God is love.

NIV, New International Bible Society, Zondervan, 1973, 1978, 1985
NRSV, Division of Christian Education, NCC, 1988