



Carstairs-Bancroft United Church
June 4, 2021
DAILY ENCOURAGEMENT
DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC
By Rev. Maria Szabone Berces



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Beloved Carstairs Bancroft United Church Members,

Weekend is coming, happy Friday to all of you! 😊 This is the time when we can spend more time with sleeping, recreation, and with family members or friends. These two days away from official work-time – if you have a job - might also give you opportunity to catch up with house chores or gardening.

A few decades ago, this was similarly the time when families dressed up as nicely as they could, and gathered in church buildings for worship services on Sundays. That has changed by our time if you look at church worship service attendance. Meeting with God and other members of the congregation in that dedicated time slot doesn't belong to the priorities of many of our baptized fellow humans.

I know that the pandemic made Christian communities of faith to reconsider what it means "to be the church". With church buildings closed, and numerous recordings available to watch any time, we can see the way we gather in a different light. What church will be like after the pandemic? And why is it a question at all, when the church as we knew it in the past isn't important at all for so many?

In my personal experience many things, tasks and 'missions' compete for our time and attention. But if we are always on the go, and never stop to take a deep breath, to try to connect with the Source of Life – whom I call God – we easily deplete and become more and more vulnerable to mental health problems.

Have you ever faced quarrels in family, workplace difficulties, exhaustion? Elijah's dire situation is not that alien or outdated if we think about it. May be our lives are not threatened directly, as his life was due to the zeal he had for a cause. But we might feel similar desperation in our job or personal life. How do we handle that? Where do we look for remedy?

I believe we can learn from Elijah, who answered the call to "**stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord**" (1 Kings 19:12) If we want to tackle life's challenges, we all need to "*shift into neutral*" and provide opportunity to hear the "**gentle whisper**" of God.

In my experience in that still voice we can find strength and hope. We might grasp what King David worded like this: "**The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.**" (Psalm 18:2)

May we all willingly hear the call of the Holy One, who expressed through Jesus: "**... how often I have longed to gather [you] together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings...**" (Matthew 23:37)

Grace and Peace to You All,

Rev. Maria



Shift into Neutral

And after the fire came a gentle whisper.

1 Kings 19:12

READ 1 Kings 19:9–12, 15–18

The man ahead of me at the carwash was on a mission. He purposefully strode to the back of his pickup and removed the hitch, so it wouldn't snag the high-powered rolling brushes. He paid the attendant then pulled onto the automated track—where he left his truck in drive. The attendant shouted after him, “Neutral! Neutral!” but the man's windows were up and he couldn't hear. He zipped through the car wash in four seconds flat. His truck barely got wet.

Elijah was on a mission too. He was busy serving God in big ways. He had just defeated the prophets of Baal in a supernatural showdown, which left him drained (see 1 Kings 18:16–39). He needed time in neutral. God brought Elijah to Mount Horeb, where He had appeared to Moses long before. Once again God shook the mountain. But He wasn't in the rock-shattering wind, earthquake, or raging fire. Instead, God came to Elijah in a gentle whisper. “When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out” to meet God (1 Kings 19:13).

You and I are on a mission. We put our lives in drive to accomplish big things for our Savior. But if we never shift down to neutral, we can zip through life and miss the outpouring of His Spirit. God whispers, “Be still, and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10). Neutral! Neutral! – By **Mike Wittmer**

REFLECT & PRAY

Father, I am still because You are God. Amen.

How do you slow down to spend time with your Father? Why is time in neutral necessary for driven people?

SCRIPTURE INSIGHT

Elijah, whose name means “my God is Yahweh,” was a prophet to the Northern Kingdom of Israel (1 Kings 17–19) during the twenty-two-year reign of Ahab, who together with his wife, Jezebel, led the Israelites to worship Baal and murdered God's prophets (1 Kings 16:29–34; 18:4; 19:10). Elijah's perception that he was “the only one left” (19:10, 14) was incorrect, for he had ignored the one hundred prophets that Obadiah had hidden (18:4). God later revealed that there were seven thousand who were faithful to Him (19:18). Paul commented on Elijah's experience in Romans 11:1–5, when he said there's a faithful “remnant chosen by grace.” – By **K.T. Sim**

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