

**Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost
August 9, 2026**

The Still Small Voice of Calm

Rev. Will Morris

**Grace Episcopal Church, Stanardsville, VA
Piedmont Episcopal Church, Madison, VA**

[1 Kings 19:9-18](#)
[Matthew 14:22-33](#)

I think I need to start with a small confession that I hope you won't find too disappointing. However, despite my best efforts, I have never been able to walk on water. Never. And I suppose, while I'm about it, I probably should add to that that despite being told by Jesus that I only have to summon up faith the size of a mustard seed, my efforts to order a mountain to move from here to there, I have, equally, always been totally unsuccessful. And, to complete the confessional trifecta about things Jesus said we should be able to do, despite my parents actually having a very fine mulberry tree in their backyard, my efforts to tell it to uproot itself and plant itself in the sea, which was conveniently only a couple of miles away, never worked. Again, complete and utter failure.

Ok. Having cleared that up let's look a little more closely at the Gospel reading. What's going on here? Well, remember from last week, Jesus has just fed the 5,000, one of the greatest and most impressive of all his miracles. A story about how apparent scarcity can, with God's help, become incredible abundance. And we rejoin the story right after that with Jesus emphatically sending the disciples off and going up the mountain to pray in perfect solitude. However, a storm blows up, wind, crashing waves, and Jesus walks on the water to the disciples' boat. As he is approaching the boat the disciples are crying out that he must be a ghost. No, no, no says Jesus, it's just me. And then in with both feet jumps Peter. Good old Peter the enthusiast, who's always talking big, but never quite delivering. Peter is us – he's you and he'd me – he's humanity. Impetuous, fearful, sometimes bombastic, always fallible. So, Peter taking the lead on the boat, tests Jesus. But despite Jesus helping him, his fear gets the better of him and he starts to sink. He can't do it. And none of us can, because we're human.

To understand what's going on there, I want to pause on the word "faith". "O you of little faith". It carries implications of worship, of interior belief, but perhaps of something slightly passive. So, I wonder if we might substitute the word "trust" here. Trust implies confidence, an understanding we won't be let down, but also a sort of mutuality – that I can rely on someone else, and they can rely on me. Jesus is asking Peter and the disciples why they don't trust him. He's just fed 5,000 men plus women and children with 5 loaves and two fishes. Which bit of that aren't they getting? Why don't you trust me? he says. It's not so much about faith allowing them to do miracles. It's more about trust, the ultimate knowledge that all will be well, that will allow them to do the work, the mission with others that Jesus, God, wants them to do. He doesn't want to send them out on the world's greatest miraculous magic show tour; he wants

them to be trusting: a trust that shines through in joy; in peace; that shows them as people who have found a better way. Only then can they truly fulfil their calling – my calling, your calling – to persuade others of the good news, and gather in the harvest of the Lord.

So, now let's move to the story of Elijah on Mount Horeb, and this for me is one of the most evocative stories in the whole Bible, Old or New Testament. Elijah has been battling with King Ahab, and has just killed 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah, provoking the wrath of Queen Jezebel who vows to kill him. So he flees in despair, wishing to end his life, and ends up on Mount Horeb where God reveals himself to him. But note before and after he reveals himself, he asks Elijah the same question: "What are you doing here Elijah?" Let me just read that to you again with three different emphases: **WHAT** are you doing here Elijah; what are you **DOING** here Elijah; what are you doing **HERE** Elijah. Those produce three slightly different answers that together give us a fuller picture. The what – the "what" is running away, seeking safety. The "doing" – is, well, being scared, fearful, and, honestly, feeling quite sorry for himself. And the "here" – well, here is a cave, high on a mountain, as far from humanity as he can put himself. And together all of these add up to one thing – despite the miracles God has performed for Elijah – Elijah does not trust God to save him. "You of little faith; why did you doubt?" Elijah, Peter, humanity. Both Peter and Elijah have been chosen for great things, to be different to other people, but they are human, as human as we are, and just as capable of losing the plot.

But, here's the good news: despite the fact that both have failed this trust test, God gives them more chances (and in Peter's case, many more chances) to develop that trust and work with God. In Elijah's case, God tells him directly: anoint Hazael, anoint Jehu, and anoint Elisha as your successor as prophet. In other words, stop running away, stop feeling sorry for yourself, and get out the cave and back to doing my work amongst humanity. Which Elijah does.

Peter receives no further instruction in the boat, but a little later is told he will be handed the keys to the kingdom of heaven. And later, and movingly, after the resurrection Jesus gives him a three-part commission. Three times he questions Peter: Do you love me? Peter says yes. Three times Jesus says "Feed my lambs", "Tend my sheep" "Feed my sheep". God still trusts Elijah. God still trusts Peter. And God trusts them to trust him back.

And one final aspect of these stories is about how God reveals himself in these situations. With Peter, God is obviously present in the form of Jesus, but how about God the Father? Note how this passage begins and how it ends. In stillness and silence. At the beginning of today's passage after the feeding of the 5,000, Jesus goes to seek out God in silence and stillness up the mountain. And at the end of the passage when they all get back into the boat, the winds suddenly drop. God is profoundly present in that stillness with Jesus, and with the disciples back in the boat.

And that point is made even more forcefully when God reveals himself to Elijah. He tells Elijah to get leave the cave and watch for him passing. First there is a great wind, but God isn't in that. Then a powerful earthquake, but God isn't in that either. Nor is God in the fire that follows the earthquake. So where is God? He's in what follows the other three, in what our translation calls the sound of sheer silence, and the King James Version even more beautifully calls the still small voice of calm. In the repeated question and answer with God, Elijah self-pityingly complains that he has been battling for the Lord, fighting his corner in dramatic circumstances, calling down fire

from heaven to consume the sacrifice, and killing the prophets of Baal and Asherah. But what God is saying on Mount Horeb is this: Elijah, I am not always in the sound and fury; not always in the big events. Sometimes I am in the smaller, quieter things. The everyday things. Trust me Elijah, God says, and I will be with you always, helping you, guiding you. But... but... you may have to listen very carefully to hear me. God is here not just in the miracles, and the big action scenes, but also in the stillness, and the silence, and the day-to-dayness of the world.

So, to return to the beginning, I – you – shouldn't worry too much about failing the walking on water test, or the moving mountains test, or the getting the Mulberry tree into the sea test. God can be there, but is more often (much more often) with us in that sound of sheer silence. Asking us to trust him, in that still small voice of calm. To be here with his people in their day to day lives. To be here feeding his lambs. Tending his sheep. Feeding his sheep. Amen