

Vulnerability – Let’s be honest...

Gracious God, May these words be words of your hope, grace and peace. Amen

1. Vulnerability – Let’s be honest. How many of you have had dreams (hmmmm) nightmares about being in the middle of the grocery store or at school ...in public and you find yourself buck naked (as my Mama would say), without a stitch of clothing on? That is one scary dream. We are not sure that we want to share what is deep within us. We push down our fears, our yearnings, and our deepest hope. Those are places of great vulnerability. The origin, roots, of the word vulnerable is “to wound” or “ability to wound”. Brene’ Brown in her book “Daring Greatly” talks about how we all put on protective armor. Women wear the armor of “super moms” (even if they aren’t mothers), “the girl who sits on the popular table” – with the perfect hair, clothes, body, the one who keeps all the balls in the air. Men wear the armor of “money makers”, “the one with all the answers”, “the fixer” and the one who rides in on the white horse. We fear that people will find out the truth. Behind the armor we are a mess – our homes get dirty, our finances aren’t set, and we can’t balance everything, and our bodies break down. There I have done it. I have told the truth. It is not pretty. But there is something powerful for in the midst of the mess is something pretty amazing, real, and authentic. And once we step out of our shiny armors, we discover we are not alone. In our vulnerability we discover we are loved just for who we are. This story about Elijah is one I enjoy. He has just won the biggest contest of his life. It was dramatic, bloody....a clear victory. Instead of having a party, he finds the queen is after him and he begins to run. He is scared and feels alone. At a time when he ought to feel powerful, he doesn’t. He even leaves a servant behind as he escapes from the Queen. He not only feels alone, he wants to make sure he is alone. But he doesn’t count on the fact that God is going to stick with him.
2. Arise and Eat – While Elijah is on the run, he is so worn out, he just wants to lie down and give up. He has had it. There is nothing more to give. Don’t dare ask him to move from that very spot he laid down. He is staying right there. But you see, there is an angel who visits him, not just once, but twice and says, “Arise and Eat”. We are called to Arise and Eat, even at times when we experience discouragement and defeat. God is with us and tells us to get up, not give up. God feeds us with new energy, vision, hope. God tells us that we are not alone. Just as Elijah, we can’t run from our call, just as Elijah can’t run from his.
3. The Still Small Voice – When Elijah makes it to Mt. Horeb he waits to hear from God. In that cave he waits for God to pass. He hears the wind whirling and whipping and blowing, thundering through the cracks and crevices of the mountain. Rocks begin to crash and roll, crack, and explode. But God is not in the wind. Then the mountain begins to shake and move...the ground cracks and shifts. Elijah holds on for dear life. But this isn’t God. A fire erupts and spreads along the mountain. Hmmmm. A fire would make sense. Moses had heard God’s call in a fiery bush at the base of Mt. Horeb. But God was not in the fire either. In ancient times people of faith believed that God was expressed through huge dramatic destructive, natural events. The street corner preachers can

understand this idea as they rant and rave about floods and fires being caused by God's punishment. But this story takes a strange and wonderful turn. Elijah in all his vulnerability experiences God in a very different way. Elijah finally has the courage to come out of the cave or as Brene' Brown would say, "take off his armor" and let himself be spiritually naked. God speaks to Elijah in a still, small voice. God comes to us in ways we don't expect. We gotta pay attention and listen, with our hearts and ears tuned to God's spirit. It is interesting that there are so many translations of this expression in the Bible – "gentle rustling", "still gentle blowing", "sounds of sheer silence", "gentle whisper", "gentle little breeze". There is a powerful stillness. In a time in our culture when we believe that power comes from big, destructive actions, a time when the dramatic is what gets media attention, we find God in the small and quiet things. I heard a musician say that God can be found in the rests, pauses, and moments of silence between each note in a piece of music. In life we find God in the in between times – the pauses in the midst of live.

4. What Are We Doing Here? – As Elijah is enveloped in God's silence, God asks the question that must be asked. What are you doing here? **WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE? WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?** (What are you just hiding out in this cave?) What are you doing **HERE?** (Why are you here instead of there, or there, or there?) What are **YOU** doing here? (Why have you decided to be other than who you know you are?)

This is a central question in our lives that we must pause and ask. God nudges us in our lives and we must ask if we are willing to be authentic followers of Christ – deep, goofy, lively, funny, grateful, honest, dedicated, real....loving.

Elijah responds to this question by spilling it all. He is ready to let it out. But God does the most surprising thing. God calls him back. God lets him know that God has his back. God lets him know that he travels and works not alone. There are others to work with him. God's vision is huge and God sees what Elijah cannot.

Our hope rests in the fact that once we come out of the cave, lay down the squeaky armor that is so hard to take off....once we let ourselves be vulnerable, we discover we do this ministry; we live our lives not alone. God has our back. God has given us a community – messy as it can be that surrounds us with hope, when we have none. God tells us to get up, feed one another and never give up.