

**TRINITY 9 2020 (YEAR A) – I Kings 19:9-13;  
Matthew 14: 22-32 - ‘God in the unexpected’**

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Curate**

How ready are we for the unexpected in our lives? Of course some of us may have had boy scout or girl guide training and have been taught to always be prepared! But actually we will all have faced different situations and events in our lives that will have come out of the blue and will have required us to react and adapt in difficult ways. However, what we have experienced in the last 5 months is exceptional - none of us have or could have been prepared for the way C19 has turned our lives upside down in so many many ways....

But I hope that we will be encouraged by God’s word today. And having posed the question *‘how ready are we for the unexpected?’*, I want to expand that question further and ask:

*‘Are we ready to find God in the unexpected?’*

In both of our readings today we find people in a crisis – in our first reading Elijah is exasperated and afraid, his world is falling about all around him as he is living amongst rebellion, and the threat to his life; he hides himself in a cave feeling very alone..... *and how these are feelings which may resonate with many of us, with many still finding themselves shut away in places of isolation, lonely and fearful during these current circumstances.*

But although aware of Elijah's circumstances God's response is to tell Elijah to "go out".....to leave the cave in which he has hidden himself, and to wait for God to pass by.

3 powerful natural phenomenon then go past the mountain on which Elijah stands – a great wind, an earthquake, and then a fire - all elements which could have destroyed Elijah! But God is not in any of them..... instead, somewhat unexpectedly, God appears in the sound of sheer silence.....

*And I think there is something about finding time to shut out the distractions and noise of the world around us, in order to rest in the silence of God's presence and peace. And to further know that such peace is a sign of God's presence.*

Meanwhile in our gospel reading, the disciples are also facing their own crisis, caught up in a massive storm that has been battering their boat around for many hours. And then to further instil their fear they suddenly see a figure walking on the sea towards them! Despite having seen Jesus do many different miracles, including feeding over 5000 people with 5 loaves and 2 fish only hours before, they do not believe for a moment that this figure could be Jesus.....instead they think it must be a ghost!

But then Jesus speaks, and tells them to take heart and not be afraid, because He is there with them....

*And once again this is something that we need to hear and remember in the storms of our lives, that Jesus promises to never leave us but to be with us through everything ....*

At the sound of Jesus's voice Peter responds in his typically rash but endearing way. "If it is you Lord, command me to come to you on the water"

Similarly to God's response to Elijah, Jesus tells Peter to: "Come"..... to step out of the boat in which he is trapped in his crisis, and to come to Him.....

And Peter does step out of the boat and he does find himself walking on the water to Jesus – until that is he takes his eyes off Jesus, distracted by the stormy

waters. Finding himself floundering and sinking he then calls to Jesus for help.

And although Jesus consequently encourages Peter to have more faith, at least Peter did have enough faith to step out of the boat in the first place. But I wonder how Peter then expected Jesus to help him? Having seen the miracles Jesus had previously performed maybe Peter was expecting Jesus to make the waves into a solid road for him to stand on, or perhaps build a shield around him to protect him from the wind? However, what Jesus actually does is something far more simple, and personal..... He just reaches out His hand and catches hold of Peter..... And as we see, Jesus's touch and presence is enough.... and the next minute they are both getting into the boat, the wind having suddenly stopped, and the storm having ceased....

In both stories, in the crises that are being faced by Elijah and Peter (and the disciples), God is there, and makes Himself present in a very personal, quiet, calming way..... Something which I think is important for us to remember and hold on to, particularly through our current situation.

Because I truly believe that God is moving in amazing and unexpected ways in these times – bringing good out of this horrible mess – and particularly wanting to awaken us to His presence all around us.

Yes, we are gathered in this church building again now – but not all of us are able to be here, and we aren't able to worship as we have been used to, and would like. Private prayer in our church buildings has been unavailable for months and even now is not back to how it was. But though church buildings are beautiful and sacred places of worship, they are not the only place for God to be found! God is far bigger than a building, so let us not confine Him!

God is the Creator of all that we see, and that we can't even see! He loves and works in and through His whole creation – constantly wanting to reach out to each one of us, and to take our hand and bring us into His loving presence.

Now, possibly more than ever, a spiritual need has been awakened – a desire for peace and calm in the C-19 storm of our lives – And God is saying to each one of us, 'Take heart, and do not be afraid, I am here' ....

But, don't put me in a box, don't confine me, look for me everywhere.....

If God made us and dwells within us, then everything in His creation can reveal Him - both animate and inanimate. ....

And so as we live through the most unprecedented *unexpected* circumstances in living memory, I encourage us to:

- remember that God does not want us to be trapped by our circumstances.....
- hold on to God's promise that He loves us and is with us
- and to be ready for Him to reveal His presence to us in the most unexpected ways, especially when we ask Him to...

AMEN