

# **St. Bride's Church of Scotland, Newtonmore**

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## **ONE IN JESUS CHRIST**

**19<sup>th</sup> June 2016**

1 Kings 19:8-18  
Galatians 3:23-29

If I say to you that we live in a noisy world, even here in Laggan/Newtonmore I don't think you would disagree. There is traffic noise, especially for those who live near one of the main roads; there are occasional fighter jets practising their low flying over us; and in summer there is often the noise of people working outside – saws buzzing, lawn mowers whirring, strimmers whining and all the rest of it. And then there is the noise which we invite into our lives, radios and televisions which are seldom switched off, in some houses, phones that are constantly in our pockets and which beep, buzz and ring to keep us up to date with the events of the world or the minutiae of our friends. And for many of us there is the desire to have our life lived to our own musical sound-track, so that when people are out walking or cycling or running, when people are sitting in busses or trains, you see the earphones fixed to their heads and you know that they are hearing the sounds of their choice.

We live with the noise of current affairs too. Currently it is hard to avoid hearing about the ins and outs of in and out, remain and leave, and sometimes we need a bit of quiet from what other people think to hear what we really think.

And even when we are not assaulting our ears with sounds, the internal commentary on our own life can be pounding just as loudly through our brains. The worries, the hopes, the delights, the despairs, the if onlys. They live there in our minds and sometimes they are almost impossible to drown out.

Elijah's internal commentary was very loud on the day he arrived at Mount Horeb. He had been travelling, walking, maybe jogging a bit, for forty days to get there, to get to the place where he believed he was most likely to meet with God; and all the time he had had the sound-track of his worry running through his head. So when he arrived and came to explain to God why he had come, you can imagine him almost gasping out his answer: "I have been... very zealous... for the Lord, the God of Hosts;... for the Israelites have forsaken... your covenant, thrown down... your altars...and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone...am left...and they are seeking my life... to take it away!" He is all churned up with what has happened, with his duel with the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel, which he won, and with the threats of retribution which the Queen Jezebel had sent after him when he killed the Baalite prophets. The noise of his life is pumping hard in his head.

And God tells him to stand at the entrance of the cave for he is about to pass by. Many, many people look for God in nature. Many of us here today know that we often feel

God closest when we are out up the Glen or in our gardens. But it wasn't a peaceful experience of nature which God had in mind for Elijah. It was a very noisy one!

Last week when I was away, you were treated to a five-hour thunderstorm, or so I'm told. When the torrential rain was deluging down, was that when you went up the glen or into your garden to get close to God? Elijah didn't have thunder, but he had every other kind of dramatic and noisy natural experience. First there was a wind. We know about wind in these parts, since we seem to have at least one gale every winter. It is noisy, it is scary, especially if you are near trees which look likely to fall. This wind that Elijah witnessed was so strong that rocks were hurled down the mountainside and split open. Then there was an earthquake, something we know very little of hereabouts, but which must have been very frightening for Elijah, in his isolated cave – which might collapse on him. Then there was a fire, a wildfire sweeping across the dry surface of the mountainside, rushing past the door of his cave, cutting him off from escape.

He had come to meet with God, but God was not in the wind, nor in the earthquake, nor in the fire. Elijah had come from a noisy showdown for God, he had come with the din of his situation ringing in his ears, and God gave him even louder things to hear. And then, when not only his ears but also his senses were ringing, there was silence, (or maybe a whisper, the translations vary).

And Elijah went to the mouth of the cave, and once more he explained to God why he had come, wrapped up in his own situation and his panic. He used exactly the same words as before.

*"I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of Hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left and they are seeking my life, to take it away."*

Noises of the world, natural phenomena, which Elijah witnessed have to some extent been superseded by human noise and shouting. Like the noise before the referendum this week. Sometimes we have to turn off the noise – and we can, as Elijah could not – and listen to the silence, and listen in the silence. In the silence Elijah voiced his complaint, as he had already when he had come in heat and haste to the mountain, and in the silence he was able to hear the reply. It was not a dramatic reply but it was a plan and a reassurance, such as we all need sometimes.

He was reminded that he was not, never had been and never would be alone, not only because God was with him, but because there were others who were equally faithful to God as he was (if not in so public or dramatic a way). They were one in God's eyes.

St. Paul also talks about our oneness, our unity with each other, that we are all one in Christ Jesus. Perhaps as we seek some time and space for thought and prayer before this week's referendum, we would do well to remember his words.

First of all, he reminds us that if we are Christian there is only one identity that really matters, and that is that we belong to Jesus Christ. Belonging to Christ gives us freedom, freedom to cast aside all the other belongings of this world which would tie us to any kind of one-up-man-ship. No Jew or Greek he says – and depending on whether you were from a Jewish or Greek background, you would be bound to think that one was better than the other. In the early Church Paul, and Peter too, had to work hard to prevent the Jewish Christians from assuming and acting as though they were naturally

superior, since they came from the race and religious heritage which had brought the world Jesus. Christians have always had a hard time with getting rid of ideas of racial superiority, which has been shown in centuries of overt racism of one kind or another. When we think about our vote on Thursday, there is no place for ideas of racial or national superiority: we belong to Christ.

Next Paul reminds the Galatians that in Jesus – and they are in Jesus if they have been baptised – there is no slave or free. But many of those who would have heard this letter read aloud were in fact slaves. The state of slavery was not abolished with the birth of the church. Equally many others would not be slaves, and their tendency would be to despise those who were, and to hold themselves superior. For even if they were not rich slave owners themselves (as few would be) they were not slaves. They had been able to keep themselves and their families from that degradation. The temptation for those who were not slaves was to think of the slaves the way that some sections of our society seem to regard people who are unemployed and live off state benefits. Jesus' rule for his followers was to love, and not to judge. When we think about our vote on Thursday we should remember that.

And lastly, in Jesus Christ there is no male or female. Obviously Paul does not mean that Christians are hermaphrodite! No, again he is talking about notions of superiority and inferiority here. To be one gender is not better than another, but both are made in the image of God, and in Jesus that equality is regained. In other words, to be a Christian, to be clothed with Jesus Christ, means that we cannot hold ourselves better than another, means that we cannot live in judgement over those who are different from us, means that we must live in love with all those made in God's image.

There is a lot of noise in our world, some of it self-imposed but much of it not. Some of it, though we can switch off so that we can listen to God in the silence of a whisper. At all times in life this is important for us to do, so that our interior monologues and screaming fears and choked sadnesses can have a chance to be heard and addressed and brought into the silence of God's peace. This week as the noise of Referendum debate swells and crescendos, take time to turn it off, to turn from the loudest voices and consider before God, not only how you will vote, but also what noise is blocking you from hearing his still small voice in your life. In Christ Jesus you are all children of God, through faith. Amen.

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