The Quiet That Sends Us Back

Revd Isaac Lawrence · October 2025

READINGS Psalm 46:1-11 · Psalm 29:3-9 · 1 Kings 19:1-18

How quickly do we reach for something to fill a quiet moment? A phone, a radio, a task, another conversation: anything to keep the silence from asking questions of us. We may call it staying busy. Sometimes it is. But sometimes busyness helps us avoid what we already know needs our attention.

Psalm 46 speaks into a world that is anything but calm. Nations rage; kingdoms totter; the earth seems to give way. The psalm does not pretend that trouble has disappeared. It names God as refuge in the middle of it, then calls us to be still and recognise who God is. Stillness here is not a trick for making God speak, nor a promise that life will become peaceful. It is a summons to stop acting as though everything depends on us.

Elijah knew what it was to be overwhelmed. After the confrontation on Mount Carmel, he fled from Jezebel's threat. He was frightened, exhausted and alone. At Horeb, he waited for the Lord. Wind tore at the mountain; the ground shook; fire followed. The passage says the Lord was not in those signs. Then came a quiet sound, and Elijah covered his face.

That moment should not make us say that God is never present in power or upheaval. Psalm 29 celebrates the Lord's voice as mighty, breaking cedars and shaking the wilderness. Scripture gives us both images: God's power is not in doubt, and God is not confined to one way of making himself known. At Horeb, Elijah needed to learn that the Lord's presence would not be controlled by the spectacular.

And the quiet did not give Elijah an escape from reality. God asked him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" The question made room for Elijah to speak honestly about his fear and loneliness. But God also challenged his conclusion that he was entirely alone. There were others who had remained faithful, even though Elijah could not see them. Then God gave him work to do and a companion to prepare for the future.

That matters. Stillness is not an invitation to retreat from the world and wait for a private feeling. It can help us hear the truth about ourselves, receive correction, and notice the people and responsibilities we have overlooked. Sometimes prayer comforts us. Sometimes it unsettles us. Sometimes the answer we receive is not a dramatic sign but the next faithful thing we must do.

So here is the challenge: what are you keeping noise around so that you do not have to face it? Is there a conversation you are avoiding, an apology you need to make, a grief you have not allowed yourself to name, or a decision you keep postponing? Silence can expose these things. That is not always comfortable, but discomfort is not the same as condemnation. God’s question to Elijah was not a rejection. It was an opening for an honest answer, and a way back into life.

We should be careful not to turn this into blame. Some people live with noise they did not choose: illness, caring responsibilities, crowded homes, anxiety or danger. God is not absent from them. The invitation to stillness is not a test of whether we are spiritual enough. It may be a small moment of attention: putting a device aside, reading a few verses slowly, sitting in a church, or asking God for help in the middle of an ordinary day.

Nor should every thought that comes in silence be treated as God’s voice. We listen with humility and test what we hear against Scripture, the character of Christ, wise counsel and the needs of our neighbour. God’s guidance does not make us more self-important; it draws us towards truth, love and faithful service.

The voice described in Psalm 29 is powerful. The quiet sound at Horeb does not make God less powerful. It shows that God can meet a frightened servant without overwhelming him, and then send him forward again. Be still, then, not because the world is harmless or because you can solve everything by becoming quiet. Be still because God is God, and you are not required to carry the whole world alone.

Make room today for honest attention. What might God be helping you see? And when you have listened, what is the next faithful step you are being asked to take?