

Nineteenth Sunday of the Year, A
[Patrick Shebeck](#)

[Lectionary 115:](#)

1 Kgs 19:9a, 11-13a
Ps 85:9, 10, 11-12, 13-14
Rom 9:1-5
Matt 14:22-33

Possible preaching themes

- The role of our physical environment in revelation (first reading and Gospel)
- The science of silence (first reading)
- The importance of water (Gospel)

Possible scientific resources

- **Geology**
 - Martine Kölbl-Ebert provides a useful introduction to the interplay of geology and religion, as the forward to an impressive volume on geology and religion. <https://www.lyellcollection.org/doi/full/10.1144/SP310.1>
 - In her book Martina Kölbl-Ebert claims that religion and geology have historically been uncertain toward one another. In *Geology and Religion: A History of Harmony and Hostility* (2009), the author examines this relationship. It is available here: <https://www.amazon.com/Geology-Religion-Publication-Geological-Publications/dp/1862392692>. Some parts are available on Google Books [https://books.google.com/books/about/Geology and Religion.html?id=w1NUHmio_jEC](https://books.google.com/books/about/Geology_and_Religion.html?id=w1NUHmio_jEC)
- **The Science of Silence**
 - Silence is beneficial for much of Christian spirituality and has immense consequences for the ways that we *remember* and the ways that our memory functions. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/258180125_Toward_a_Science_of_Silence_The_Consequences_of_Leaving_a_Memory_Unsaid
 - Silence is not only important for our spiritual life but also contributes to our mental health and well being <https://health.clevelandclinic.org/why-you-need-more-silence-in-your-life/> also <https://psychcentral.com/blog/the-hidden-benefits-of-silence#boosts-creativity>

- Though translated as “tiny whispering sound” “whisper,” or “still small voice,” the Hebrew word *הממך* should be translated as “silence.”
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/i40096999>
- **Water** resources and climate change have profound social implications that are only increasing.
 - Here is an article on increasing population needs for water:
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0065211307950014>
 - Scientists themselves understand that we need a “water ethic”
<https://www.americanscientist.org/article/why-we-need-water-ethics>
 - Meredith Anne Denton has produced *Hydrology Theology: How I Studied Water And Found God*. <https://www.amazon.com/Hydrology-Theology-Studied-Water-Found-ebook/dp/B08MDMXPJ>

Preaching outline combining the resources

- **Setting the scene:**
 - Many people are not familiar with the narrative trajectory of 1 Kings; it is useful to give some background story as to *why* Elijah is hiding in the cave. The political background here is extremely important and can be found in any biblical commentary.
 - The first reading and Gospel center around the natural world (particularly rich with geological themes) that are upset from their natural order.
 - However, “upset geology” essentially *is* the natural order of the earth’s crust; the “mountains” of which the writer speaks would not even exist were it not for the violent clash of moving plates, volcanos, and shifting tectonics.
 - God does not only build violence into creation, but also employs creation as a vehicle for divine revelation.
 - The point of these readings is not geology; the natural world is rather a context in which God and Elijah’s relationship (and indeed, God’s relationship with Jezebel, Ahab, and their priests) takes place;
 - Further, the natural environment reveals God’s saving acts.
 - The world around us may be violent (even the natural world, in some cases). Yet in the midst of that, God is protecting, saving, and shielding. So in the first reading God saves Elijah from the disruptive and dangerous political situation in which he must be faithful.
- **The importance of silence**
 - Silence is sometimes difficult for moderns to grasp, given the constant media stimulation we experience, something scientific research has demonstrated actually changes our brains.
 - Memory is one important aspect of our being that is aided or diminished by silence.
 - This raises questions about how our lack of silence might contribute to the “forgetting” the the most important things: the relationships we

have with each other, the relationship that we have with God, and our relationship to the earth itself.

- Might this be why God does not come to Elijah in the loud and violent movement of the earth?
- One way to read the “tiny whispering sound” (or “still small voice”) in the first reading is to view it as subverting the surrounding chaos (including the political decrees of Ahab and Jezebel).
- From that perspective we can wonder how the discipline of silence shapes and nourishes the Christian heart in a world of constant stimulation and even chaos.
- **Jesus, the chaos of nature, and silence**
 - The miracle of Jesus walking on the water is beyond the scope of natural physics, but theologically is similar to some of the revelation of the first reading insofar as God uses the natural world as a context for some critical revelation.
 - While the revelation to Elijah comes in the “tiny whispering sound” the revelation to the disciples occurs while wind and waves whip up around Jesus and almost sink Peter.
 - Still Jesus demonstrates not only a form of power over but also oneness with nature. Neither he nor the Holy One in the first reading are against nature but join with nature in revelation.
- **Listening to Nature**
 - The current geological age is sometimes called the Anthropocene, i.e., a moment in earth’s time that reveals the major impact of human activity on the environment.
 - The water, wind and other aspects of nature that God employed for revelation are now subverted by human pollution, no longer revealing the power and goodness of God but rather human greed.
 - Just as silence is good for our spiritual and mental health, so taking a quiet moment as individuals and a community to listen to the earth is an important ethical exercise that is important for nature’s health.
 - The natural world has been wounded by our inattentiveness to Mother Earth.
 - In *Laudato Si’* Pope Francis calls us to an integral ecology, caring for our common home and for all who inhabit it.
 - Today we take a pause from the noise around us, to listen in silence to the environment so that we can stop the devastation and, in the words of the Psalmist, “truth shall spring out of the earth” again.

Tags: Anthropocene, geology, revelation, silence, water

About the Preaching with the Sciences Initiative

A primary way Roman Catholics explore their faith and nourish their spirituality is by participating in Sunday Mass and actively engaging in the homily. However, few preachers explicitly connect faith or spirituality with science. The Preaching with the Sciences initiative, made possible by a generous grant from the John Templeton Foundation, gathers scientists and leading homileticians to explore the positive contributions

science can make to preaching, and consequently contribute to more contemporary modes of believing. Such contributions are grounded in the rich imaginations that scientists bring to their work as well as in scientific discoveries that have a potential for revealing religious truths and even shedding new insight on ancient teachings and beliefs.

With guidance from world-renowned scientists with differing areas of expertise, a select number of homileticians will draft homily outlines for preaching key Sundays and feast days across the 3-year lectionary cycle. Over 100 homily outlines will highlight some of the way's sciences and the contemporary search for religious meaning can interface. These free homiletic resources have the potential to influence thousands of preachers seeking help each week in crafting sermons and helping to shape a scientifically informed religious imagination among future preachers.