The story of Elijah is one of the most remarkable episodes in all of the Old Testament. Although he is mentioned in only approximately seven chapters of the Old Testament, his influence is still felt in Judaism today, for he is seen as the forerunner of the Messiah. At the Jewish Passover a seat is kept vacant for his return. Elijah appears on the pages of the Scripture in a highly dramatic fashion, by suddenly announcing a three year drought. His exit is equally dramatic. He is taken up to heaven in a fiery whirlwind. Between his entrance and exit a series of intense and emotional events take place which seem to boggle the mind. His running battle with Ahab and Jezebel lead him to the heights of glory and depths of despair. In the scripture which we will be looking at tonight, Elijah learns an important lesson about reality and about God’s presence which I think is very applicable to us today.

Only a few days before, Elijah had shown the people of Israel in a highly spectacular fashion that Yah-
Elijah was a dramatic, emotional man as the scripture indicates. He was subject to sudden changes of mood and circumstance. God chose to reveal his reality to Elijah in a manner which complemented his fiery personality. Elijah was evidently very depressed. He had taken forty days to make a journey to Mt. Horeb from Beer-sheba - a journey which ordinarily would take much less time. He had not eaten in all that time, and had already indicated a willingness for God to take his life. But God had other plans for Elijah and He made those plans known in a most unusual way. The manner in which God revealed His will for Elijah is our focus for this evening, for I think it presents a striking parable about the way we do life a great deal of the time.

Albert Ellis, a psychotherapist, has developed a new counseling theory which he calls rational-emotive-therapy. The basis of this theory is that the way we think is the basis for our behavior. If we have a distorted view of the world or have irrational assumptions about the way life is, then our feelings and actions are going to be irrational also. He says that no one or no thing has any power to influence our actions unless we give it power by our own irrational思维方式. For example:

1. It is unrealistic to believe that everyone is going to agree with us all the time, like us all the time, love us all the time. We should not expect it.
2. It is unrealistic to believe we can be successful in every venture, that we can be perfect in all we attempt to do, or be. No one ever has been, no one ever will.
3. It is unrealistic to believe that there is any job, almost any task that doesn’t have its frustrations, its discouragements, its disappointments. Some do more than others, some less, but they are always there.
4. It is unrealistic to believe there is any relationship in home, work, or play that doesn’t have some tension, some stress, some differences. As long as we deal with people we will deal with some problems.
5. It is unrealistic to believe there is any place, city, church, neighborhood, that is ideal: that is completely free from problems, or that there is any place or situation that does not need change or improvement. There is no such thing as Utopia.
6. It is unrealistic to believe that we will ever be completely free from feelings of guilt, doubt, inadequacy, anxiety, or anger. They are a part of being human. They need to be understood and controlled, but they are always present.
7. It is unrealistic to feel that others should be blamed for all they say and do. All people have their own problems and tensions. Most people want to do better. If we understood the background we would probably understand the behavior.
8. It is unrealistic to feel we are entirely victims of fate or outside circumstances, that we have no control over what we think, feel, or do.
9. It is unrealistic to feel that there is only one solution to any given situation or that there are catastrophic if we do not find our solution.
10. It is unrealistic to feel that the way we are, that we are conditioned by past experiences or environmental circumstances and therefore cannot change.
11. It is unrealistic to believe we can achieve anything significant quickly or that we can change in a hurry. Achievement and change are possible but they usually come slowly and in small steps.
12. It is unrealistic to feel that there is only one solution to any given situation or that things are catastrophic if we do not find our solution.

Twelve whirlwinds that keep us from finding the center of truth in God’s stillness. I wonder if you found one or two that applied to you? I think we can see that Elijah was buffeted around by several of his own whirlwinds. He must have believed that he would be successful at every venture and that he could win every battle. Had he not prophesied correctly that three years of drought would come? Had he not triumphed spectacularly over the prophets of Baal, and had he not killed them all single-handedly with the sword? But because he didn’t win all the time, because he couldn’t win everyone over to his way of thinking, he considered himself a failure. When he began to have feelings of failure, he stumbled into his second whirlwind: namely that successful people or religious people shouldn’t have feelings of doubt or failure. He had triumphed so gloriously on Mt. Carmel; he must have felt that everything was going to be alright from that point on. But when it wasn’t, he wanted God to take his life. He found himself in another whirlwind too. He thought that significant change could be effected quickly. He had hoped that when Ahab saw the might and power of God on Mt. Carmel, the king would become a true man, throw off Jezebel’s idolatrous influence and lead the Kingdom back to God. If you know the history of the Hebrew people you know how unrealistic that was. Significant change just doesn’t usually come that quickly. So Elijah, spinning and twirling from whirlwinds of his own making, stumbled across the desert to Mt. Horeb and hides in a cave. It was only when the Lord passed by on the mountain in such a dramatic way, that Elijah suddenly realized that reality and truth were not in whirlwinds or the earthquakes or the fires, but the stillness and silence of God.

You may be saying, this is not new to me - everybody knows that no one can win every battle or have everyone like him or her all the time. However, even though we may realize the truth of these statements intellectually, we may still be acting on them emotionally. That is even though we may realize that we can’t please everyone, we still go around trying to operate so that no one gets mad at us. Our emotional need to be liked overrides our intellectual realization that it isn’t possible, and we get caught in a whirlwind of the first magnitude. If Elijah had acted on his impulses and looked for God in the whirlwind, he would have been blown off of the mountain. We often get blown and buffeted around because we react to our impulses - those blustery, whirlly, shaky, fiery voices behind us - and do not listen to the Center of things - the stone silence where God is to be found.
What can this stance of silence tell us? In the stillness of reflection we find that God is present, and that our unrealistic ideas about life have no basis in fact. It is the stillness and the silence that helps us put things back together. He asks us the same question which he asked Elijah: “What are you doing here?” We would impulsively answer in the same way as Elijah out of the quaking, fiery whirlwind of our experiences: “I’m alone, I’m a failure.” But the silence, that awful, lovely healing silence centers us down and helps us find what true reality is. What is that reality? That grace is available to us when we falter; that the love of God surrounds us in our time of need. That no one has to be right all the time, that everyone feels crummy some of the time, that nobody is lovable all of the time, that everybody dislikes themselves a great deal of the time, that every teenager feels lost some of the time, that every parent feels helpless a lot of the time, that every middle aged man and woman panics sometimes, that every retired person doubts their usefulness to anybody sometimes, that everybody feels like giving up some of the time. But that deep stone silence of God says more. It says its O. K. to feel that way sometimes. That inscrutable silence envelopes us, gets us down to where reality really is and tells us, in the sound of gentle blowing, you are my child, and my grace is enough for you.

God did not stop with the silence for Elijah. He went beyond it with a plan of action and a word of hope. God told Elijah to do three things: to anoint the King of Syria, to anoint the King of Israel, and to anoint his own successor. He was saying to Elijah, “Now that you know where the Truth is again, I’ve got work for you to do. There is a future outside of my chosen people, for my chosen people and for my special messengers. There is a future, Elijah.”

He gave him a task and he gave him a word of comfort. He said, “Elijah, you are not alone. There are still 7,000 people in Israel just like you that have not given in to Baal. Take hope — you have brothers in the fight, and you have a future.”

That is the living word for you who are caught in your own whirlwinds tonight — there is a center of silence in the midst of turmoil — there is a word of hope in the midst of uncertainty. Take hope — you have