In the Midst of Storms
By John Upton

What a season of life we are in! As I write, BGAV Disaster Response teams are heading south to help with hurricane recovery. Virginians are still trying to assess what happened in Charlottesville with racial tensions and trying to find ways to speak to the anger and hate in our society. As if that is not enough, the U.S. and North Korea are exchanging hostile words with one another, pushing ever closer to open conflict. With all these storms pressing us, it is no wonder our anxieties are high. When we add the anxiety that comes with daily challenges of life and church, it can all seem almost insurmountable.

Is anybody depressed? Is anybody worn out, burned out, stressed out, tired of the confusion, and ready to withdraw and disappear? All of us at some point do our share of sighing.

Maybe what we need is a reminder from one who has been there ahead of us. The Elijah story is a story of a strong, gifted, faithful human being slumped down under a broom tree with his head in his hands. There are days when I look out at our Baptist family that I see a forest of broom trees with exhausted individuals slumped under each one. Like Elijah, it is okay to sit for awhile under our tree. Most of us think we are the only ones who feel this way. The struggle is usually in secret. Most of us probably think there is something uniquely wrong with us; everyone else is brave and sure.

If you could get inside your heroes’ heads, you’d know better. You would see the hidden struggle beneath the outer success. You would see the secret fear behind the public courage. They’re just like you. Just like me.
What is it we need? We need a great many things but, like Elijah, the first thing we need is rest. To be a better saint, we must first be a better creature. We are not a spirit; we are a body. Rest. Sleep is grace. Sleep is trust. Sleep is obedience that we are not God but a creature. Then eat. The smell of pancakes can be healing. It is all part of our daily bread.

When we take time to recover, we become open to God's voice again, which usually comes in a question, like: “What are you doing here, Elijah ... John ... you?” Isn't it interesting that when I am feeling small and circling myself, God brings up a purpose bigger than me! If a terrible silence has come to your life, maybe the silence is a sign of a bigger mission than we have been serving. Maybe it is a sign that it is time to find our people. Oh, and when you do, when you leave the cave of yourself and go blinking back into the sunlight, notice there are about 7,000 faithful children who are there; that is your sustaining family. Walter Brueggemann says we miscount our community by 6,999.

I don't know where this finds you—maybe under some tree of some kind. If it finds you inside your cave of silence, you can be born outward to a new sense of purpose for you and for your people. Wherever these days find you, you are not far from Christ, who also wept on a tree, was laid in a cave, and who rose to gather us to a purpose and a family.

I don't know how quick Elijah's step may have been or how high he held his head when he finally emerged. But as he walked toward his purpose and toward his brothers and sisters, I know he found his joy. So will we.

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