In my family when the kids were in elementary school, from time to time I would take a day off from work and would let one of the kids stay home from school for what the kids came to call “alone time”. Each child had a turn, and on this day he or she got to choose where they wanted to go – like the Science Museum or a special place of interest. we would have lunch, maybe McDonalds. It wasn’t really alone time because in fact, on these days there were two of us, me and one of the kids. But the kids thought this was a pretty neat thing, all alone with Mom and no other siblings in the way. A day when they got my full uninterrupted attention. A neat thing until, of course, they got to be teenagers.

Today’s readings brought me back to this “alone time” routine. Elijah and Jesus both seek alone time – for different reasons – but for both, alone time is an essential and necessary part of their faith and prophetic ministry.

Elijah is battered by the cares of the world, beaten down from the hard work of being a prophet. Elijah, the great prophet from the northern kingdom of Israel has challenged the power of Israel’s King Ahab and Ahab’s wife, Jezebel. Elijah spoke out against them; condemned them for turning away from God to worship the Canaanite god, Ba’al; condemned them for building a temple to Ba’al in Samaria. Jezebel has threatened to kill him. In our reading. Elijah runs as far away as he can get from Ahab and Jezebel. He flees to a desert cave on top of Mount Sinai.

There, in a beautiful encounter, Elijah finds God again. But not in the power of a wind storm breaking rocks and shattering mountains. Nor in the tremendous jolting and seizing of an earthquake. Not in the powerful intensity of fire. But in sheer silence. Alone time. Alone time with the Lord. Through this encounter, Elijah is reassured and renewed in God’s presence. God sends him out to continue his prophetic mission.

In today’s Gospel there are fierce winds on the Sea of Galilee, fears of a phantom on the Sea, Jesus walking on water, and Peter valiantly jumping out of the boat to greet Jesus. But first, notice the quieter part of this Gospel story: the silence, the prayer time between Jesus’ powerful acts of healing, feeding, and saving. The pause to be with God. Alone time.

Jesus has been trying to retreat somewhere by himself to pray for some time. He tried when heard the awful news that Herod had beheaded John the Baptist. But the crowds would not leave him alone. Instead of retreat, Jesus came ashore to cure the sick and feed them, thousands of them. At the start of today’s Gospel, once again Jesus tries to retreat to a quiet place to pray. This time he succeeds. He climbs a mountain to spend the evening alone in prayer. Alone time with God.

What is his prayer? Does Jesus pray for more courage after the horrendous tragedy of John the Baptist’s execution? For refreshment from exhaustion? Perhaps, there were no asks. Maybe, like the prophet Elijah, he is simply filled with the presence of God in the silence of that night. We can only ponder.

We do know thatin the early morning Jesus heads down the mountain to the Sea of Galilee and the whirl of activity takes over. The disciples are battered by waves at sea, the wind against them. And terrified by a ghost. Or not a ghost. It is Jesus coming to them with those words: take heart, it is I. Do not be afraid. Perhaps it was these very words that Jesus heard in his alone time on that mountaintop with God.

Maybe we won’t face the kind of fear that Elijah experienced as he fled for his life after prophesying and doing the Lord’s command. Nor will we face the daunting hardship and betrayal Jesus’ experienced in his ministry on earth. We may face something akin to to the disciples’ fear on those waters, especially if we consider what this Gospel story shows us: there is some risk being a disciple. Risk of being battered in the walk for God. Risk of having our trust in God’s way shaken.

First the prophet Elijah shows us, and then Jesus: Find some space to listen. In that silence God will find you. God will be present to calm you, renew your spirit, and send you out again.

At the end of July, we celebrated the life of Congressman John Lewis, a prophet of this era who in the tradition of Elijah, also understood that sometimes standing up or speaking in the name of faith, can cause a little trouble – good trouble, to be sure. A man who started out preaching as a youngster to the farm creatures and turned that preaching ministry into a lifelong quest for social justice; a mission uncovered and watered by his faith.

As I watched and listened to the week-long home going journey and the celebrations of his life and legacy, I heard stories of remarkable, hard-won victories and arrests and beatings and setbacks. I kept wondering how Congressman Lewis preserved that joy and “unbreakable perseverance” so celebrated at his funeral. One answer – alone time.

In a 2004 interview Congressman Lewis was asked, “How did you move forward without being paralyzed by hate?” He answered: “I think I had maybe what I call an executive session with myself, and maybe an executive session with God Almighty, and said, “I’m not going to hate. I don’t want to go down that road. I’ve seen too much gate, seen too much violence, And I know love is a better way.”

Something miraculous indeed in stormy waters.

We all need executive sessions with the Lord. Alone time. Daily. We need those executive sessions with God to listen for the certainty of God’s steadying whisper. Stillness to find the power and force of God. Stillness to hear those words once again: Take heart. It is I do not be afraid. To see where those words take us.

There is no one way to have alone time with God. It is a spiritual practice to grow into. Whatever your spiritual practice is, find an alone time space

A neat thing for all of us of any age.