



SUNDAY 27th August 2021.

1 Kings 19:1-18

Elijah hears God.

Our Scripture contains the story of Elijah. It seems he had been very busy – he was used by God to demonstrate His power to the people.

When King Ahab married Queen Jezebel, she brought

her gods with her, wanting to convert the Kingdom of Israel to complete devotion to her gods.

But Elijah was a bold man and he stood up to Ahab and Jezebel. Elijah issued a challenge to Jezebel and all the prophets of her gods–Baal and Asherah

They meet on Mt. Carmel for a showdown. He told them to build an altar and sacrifice an animal on it and he would do the same. Whichever god was real would be the one that brings the fire himself to burn up the sacrifice.

450 prophets of Baal spend the whole day crying out, dancing, chanting and cutting themselves – but nothing happened.

Then it was Elijah's turn. He was so confident that God would deliver that Elijah doused the altar and the wood with water. Then God shows up and a great fire burns up the sacrifice, the altar, and all the water!

With this success Elijah then takes all the prophets of Baal and destroys them. He tells Ahab to look out over the horizon to see the storm cloud forming. A huge rainstorm appeared and a three-year drought was broken.

At this point Elijah is feeling pretty good. The victory is his. God is avenged. Life makes sense. He's done everything he was supposed to do.

Then it happens. A messenger comes to him to say that Jezebel has vowed to kill him. What a turn-around for Elijah – he had to find the strength to outrun a chariot, he was having a panic attack and he fled from Jezebel.

That was not how it was supposed to go. This was the point where the nation was supposed to turn back to God and the wicked queen overthrown.

What would you do in that moment?

Possibly what Elijah did - Elijah ran and ran for 40 days, all the way to Beersheba, the southern most city of Judah. From there he hid in the wilderness, collapsing under a bush and asked God to let him die.

40 seems to be an important number in the Bible. It rained for 40 days and 40 nights to flood the earth. The Israelites were slaves for forty decades. Moses was on Mt. Sinai for 40 days. The Israelites wandered in the desert for 40 years. Jesus was in the wilderness for 40 days.

Many of us know the disappointment and depression that can follow after we finally make it to the top. Elijah had accomplished all a prophet could possibly do.

But instead of finding satisfaction and safety in the God he knew to be all powerful, he surrendered to fear. Elijah did everything right, and things still went wrong. I wonder if he was feeling disappointed in God?

Even the greatest heroes of faith have 40day experiences of fear, loneliness, dryness, and hunger. It happens, and it prepares us for what God is doing.

The interesting thing about this story is the place to which Elijah runs. He heads back to Mt. Sinai. It's like he was thinking, when all else seemed lost, he needed to go back to where it all started, to get back to his roots, to his past.

Isn't that how we often do things?

Many times when things get confusing we want to go back to a remembered past when things made more sense to us. We want to recapture traditions and "the good old days."

We want to go back to Mt. Sinai.

Elijah gets there, wallowing in self-pity and depression and God asks him an interesting question. **"What are you doing here, Elijah?"**

Elijah's answer, though technically correct, came from his deep depression and fear, rather than from the reality to be found in God's power and protection.

Elijah cries out, "I've done everything right. I've stood up for You, and nothing has gotten better. The Israelites have rejected Your covenant, torn down Your altars and put Your prophets to death with the sword. I'm the only one left and now they are trying to kill me too. All is lost."

God didn't rebuke Elijah in his depression. Instead, God revealed Himself to the despondent prophet. God says "Step out here and let me show you something." As instructed by the Lord, Elijah exited the cave where he had been holding a one-man pity party, to wait on the mountain for the Lord to pass by. I can just imagine Elijah getting excited at this point. God is going to reveal himself to me on this mountain, just like he did to Moses. This is just what I need right now.

A huge wind comes along. Boom, crash! Elijah thinks, "this is it!" But God was not in the wind.

An earthquake shakes everything. Elijah is ready. But God was not in the earthquake.

A fire burns all around. Elijah thinks, surely God is here. But God was not in the fire.

Then there was sheer silence. Nothing. I wonder how long that lasted. Then finally God spoke to his prophet in a gentle whisper.

I wonder where you are on your journey right now.

You may have experienced some great victories recently. Or you may be cowering and crying in the caves like Elijah, overwhelmed by fear or depression.

You may find yourself at each of these places multiple times throughout your life. Maybe you are experiencing your Mt. Sinai for the first time and God is doing amazing things in your life right now. That's awesome.

Maybe you are in the wrestling match with God. Maybe you have been faithful and you are disappointed and you are experiencing your 40 days.

No matter where you find yourself, you need to turn down the volume of the noise within you and open up your ears so you can hear that soothing whisper.

God asks us to seek Him daily in prayer and meditate on His word, so that our fear and sense of failure can be displaced by an informed and growing faith.

Two things we can learn here.

First, you can't go back. You can remember and honour the past, but you can't go back.

Second, God lives in the Promise of renewing all things and works in new ways for every generation. His mercy is new every morning. Our job is to trust in God's faithfulness and be willing to listen to the whisper of God.

The world is changing and God is moving in fresh and wonderful ways as the Holy Spirit empowers and guides us to love and embrace each other. May we be encouraged that God still speaks, even in the silence, as God has an exciting future for us.