

Written Copy For: How God Speaks – 1 Kings 19:9-13

Proper 8 – 3rd Sunday after Pentecost

June 30th 2019

Text: 1 Kings 19:9-13

⁹ There he came to a cave and lodged in it. And behold, the word of the LORD came to him, and he said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" ¹⁰ He said, "I have been very jealous for the LORD, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away." ¹¹ And he said, "Go out and stand on the mount before the LORD." And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. ¹² And after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire the sound of a low whisper. ¹³ And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. And behold, there came a voice to him and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

Exegetical Statement

Elijah has come to Mount Horeb: the mountain of God on the strength of the divine food the Angel of the Lord had given him. Now the LORD wants to feed him spiritually. He wants to re-focus his ministry so that he returns to a focus on what God asks of Him and let the LORD define what is victory and what is not. As the LORD passes by Elijah on the mountain, he experiences the awesome and terrifying natural forces of hurricane wind, earthquake, and fire. While these things are the result of His passing the LORD is not in them. He is greater than them; He is above them. And while He can and does use those things to speak words of warning and judgment to men, that is not how He chooses to speak to His embattled servant Elijah. He speaks to the prophet through a quiet and faint whisper. "What are you doing here Elijah?" Why are you in hiding as if all is lost. I have work for you to do as a prophet. You think you are the only prophet left and yet I have set aside for myself 7,000 men who have not bowed to worship Baal. Go and do the part I ask of you and let me worry about what is victory and what is defeat in Israel's worship of Baal. And so Elijah heads back through the wilderness the way he came. He calls Elisha to be his understudy who the LORD has chosen to succeed him. Elisha hears the call, leaves behind his life as a farmer as symbolized by his thanksgiving sacrifice of the oxen, and follows Elijah.

Focus Statement:

Our LORD calls to us through His still small voice of His Word and Sacrament telling us He has already won the victory over our worst enemies on the cross. His will is always done and He not only knows what tomorrow will bring He is already there. And tomorrow will bring victory for all those He calls by faith.

Function Statement:

Why it's important to know:

We look at the problems that surround us as the Church and as individuals and see defeat and hopelessness. From our shortsighted view of right now we judge what we see to be success and failure, and as a result experience the hopelessness of Elijah

What the hearer should do as a result:

We serve our LORD focusing on what He asks us to do in our vocations and let Him wring Victory out of what we see as defeat.

Subject Sentence: God defines victory in His small yet powerful word

We know how Elijah felt. I know how Elijah felt as he arrived at Mount Horeb in our Old Testament Reading. He felt as you and I feel when the efforts we put into something don't pan out. When we plan an event and hardly anyone shows up. Especially so when it comes to ministry either in our own personal witness or as a part of the Church. Yesterday Franklin Mission held a Clean and Green Event where they send volunteers out into the surrounding area to pick up trash in vacant lots and mow the grass. In the past they've had as many as 150 volunteers. Yesterday they had around 10. They know how Elijah feels. We know how Elijah feels as we witness to the decline of the importance of the Church in our culture. As the younger generations fall away from regular church attendance and fall away from the faith, or as is the case now with many of them never had faith to begin with. We know how Elijah felt when we invite our loved ones to church and they never come. When we try to talk with them about Jesus and they turn away and leave the room. When they stop wanting to get together with us. We know how Elijah felt as we watch the membership numbers in our Synod as well as other denominations continue to decline. We try different things and they don't seem to work. We can feel helpless and hopeless. That's how Elijah felt too.

When we encounter Elijah in our Old Testament Reading, we see him as he comes down from a literal and figurative mountain top experience. Israel had been experiencing a severe drought: there had been no rain for the past three years. The people of Israel had turned away from the LORD GOD and were worshipping a Canaanite God named Baal who they believed was the god of fertility, the god who brought the rain. To show them how wrong they were the One True God who causes the rain to fall and the crops to grow withheld the rain so that no matter how fervently they prayed to Baal no rain would come. So that they might know Baal is not real. But they kept up encouraged and directed by their King Ahab and especially his Queen Jezebel.

But at the end of the three years the LORD came to Elijah and told him it was time for a showdown between He and Baal. It happened on top of Mount Hermon where 400 prophets of Baal gathered to face off against just Elijah. The God who answered by fire first would be declared the On True God. Elijah allowed the Baal prophets to go first. They spent

the entire day dancing around their altar, calling on the name of Baal, trying to get his attention through any and all means, even cutting themselves. By the time of the evening sacrifice they were worn out, and no fire had appeared to consume their sacrifice. Then Elijah rebuilt the stone altar of the LORD that had been torn down. He laid his sacrifice upon it and had water poured over it until everything was drenched and a pool of water lay around the base of the altar. Then he called out to the LORD with a simple, yet faith filled prayer, asking Him to show all present that He alone is God. And the LORD answered his prayer sending fire down from heaven. The fire consumed the sacrifice, the stone altar and the water that had been poured. All those assembled cried out "The LORD, He is God." Elijah had the 400 prophets of Baal rounded up and executed. Then he prayed to that One True God that He might bring the rain. And it comes! Elijah warns King Ahab who had been witness to all this that he'd better start back to his palace before the rain made his travel difficult. And then Elijah, strengthened by the LORD outraces Ahab back to the city. Truly this was for Elijah a mountain top experience. What a great victory for the LORD His God. And surely this would mean the final defeat for Baal worship in the land.

Except that it wasn't. Elijah had forgotten the number one Baal worship supporter: Queen Jezebel. It didn't matter to her what had happened on Mount Hermon or the Elijah's prayer was answered with rain. Her priests were now dead. And Elijah was to blame. And he would pay dearly for their death, with his own life Jezebel vowed. This was too much for Elijah. Instead of Baal worship ending it appeared it would continue on. And Elijah who considered himself the last prophet, the last true believer in the LORD, was about to be hunted down and killed by Jezebel who was the power behind the throne. In fear and desperation, he took off. He went south through the land of the Northern Kingdom of Israel and through the southern kingdom of Judah into the wilderness beyond. He collapsed under a broom tree: a bush that provided just enough shade to prevent death. He had failed. What he thought was victory over Baal worship had been just another defeat in his efforts to turn the hearts and minds of his people back to God. He felt it was time to give up. He asked the LORD to take his life.

That's when the LORD comes to him. The Angel of the LORD Himself: God the Son taking on and angelic appearance comes to him twice and refreshes him with food and water and tells him to rest up. Then, with his body refreshed by this divine meal Elijah is strong enough to continue on for 200 miles, traveling on through the wilderness for 40 days until he reaches Mount Horeb, also known as Mount Sinai, the very mountain where Moses met with God to receive the 10 Commandments. The LORD had refreshed him physically. Now it was time to refresh and renew his shattered faith.

(1 Kings 19:9-10) After Elijah spends the night in a cave on the mountain the LORD calls to him and asks "What are you doing here Elijah?" Elijah responds by pouring his heart out to the LORD saying "I have tried so hard to be your servant and your witness to call the people of Israel back to you. But they have abandoned your covenant, torn down your altars, killed the rest of your prophets and now I alone remain with a price on my head. The Lord responds by telling Elijah to take a stand at the entrance to his cave while the LORD passes by in front of him. And as the LORD passes by Elijah witnesses three awe inspiring and terrifyingly powerful examples of the destructive forces of nature: hurricane force winds that tear at the rock cliffs surrounding him and shatter them, an earthquake, and a wild fire.

Why did the LORD give this demonstration to Elijah? These three things occurred as a result of the LORD passing by and yet He was not in them. His presence caused them, but He is not affected by them. The LORD stands outside of them, above them. He can and does use them to speak warnings and judgement upon men. But that is not how He will speak to this broken servant standing before Him. Instead He speaks with a faint, calm, yet audible whisper; asking again "What are you doing here Elijah?"

It's the same small, calm voice that He speaks to you and I with. He speaks with these words written on the pages of our Bible. They appear to be just words. They don't come at us in a bellowing and amplified voice that we can't ignore. They are in books that sit on coffee tables unopened and unread. His faint calm voice is heard here in Church by Pastors who sometimes skip words and mispronounce them. His faint, small, calm voice is heard through sermons that are sometimes too long and meandering, that do not always apply to your lives as the preacher might like them to. His faint small voice is joined with every day

common elements: water, bread, and wine; things that are available to be purchased in any number of stores in the area. Yet through these common means, and through broken sinful people such as you and I. He speaks and changes lives, just as He did for Elijah.

He does that through His words we call the Gospel. His words that describe how what we sometimes regard as defeat in our lives is not the truth. When Jesus suffered and died on the cross those who looked on saw defeat. But defeat in the hands of Jesus is turned into victory. That was the place where Jesus gathered all the losses we have incurred from our sinful thoughts, words, and actions and took them away. He suffered our defeat upon the cross taking from us the suffering and death we earned and deserved. And instead gives to us the victory His life won for us: life now as children of the Heavenly Father and life everlasting. His death, which should've spelled defeat, was actually the greatest victory ever for you, for me, and for all men. No longer can the devil accuse us of our sins because they have been forgiven and paid for.

And even now when we lose the battle to temptation, that still does not mean defeat. The Holy Spirit given to each of us in Baptism uses that calm, small voice of the God's Word to move us to see our sins and ask forgiveness of them. And through those words He empowers us by faith to hold fast the Jesus' victory for us, that even these sins have been forgiven. He moves us to go forward desiring to change and be more like Jesus, each and every time we sin, even when we struggle with the same sins over and over. Simple words printed in Bibles that are readily available for all. A message that looks just like printed words on a page. But words that in the hands of the God's Spirit are the power to change hearts and lives.

Those times when we feel surrounded by defeat. Those times when we feel just like Elijah. Those are times when we find ourselves making the same mistake Elijah did. We think that we form our narrow perspective of right now, with a somewhat limited view of the past, are in a position to judge what is victory and what is defeat. But the LORD is the only one fit to judge that; both in our lives and in the life of the Church. He is already there in our tomorrow, and they days following that, just as He was there in our yesterdays. He is with us now. He not only knows what will happen tomorrow, but whatever it is will be in

keeping with His will and plan. The most disastrous forces of nature can't stop him. Not even the most wicked of leaders like Queen Jezebel. When we feel like just curling up in a ball and giving up the LORD comes to us just as He did Elijah in his calm, soft, yet powerful word and asks us: "What are you doing here? Let me decide what is victory and what is defeat. Let me deal with the future of my Church. Let me worry about the eternal destiny of even your loved ones. After all it is my Word in the hands of my Spirit that changes hearts and lives. All you have to do is continue to be faithful to the work I have given you: be my witness in word and action to those around you that I bring to you in your various vocations of life. Tell them that I love them, that I died for them, and that their sins are forgiven. Let me decide when and how I bring that message to bear on their lives. And when you fail at this, preach that message of my grace and love to yourselves, because you too are forgiven.

There have been times in the past for you and for me when we can say we know just how Elijah felt. Times when we feel that we have failed. Times when we feel defeated. These are times when we need to turn to that small calm voice that we find in God's Word. When we need to privately and in surrounded by our brothers and sisters in faith listen to what He has to say to us. When we need to listen to His voice that works wonders and miracles in your heart and mine. His Word that assures us that the end of our life on this earth will mean victory for us, the victory won for us by Christ on the cross. A victory that He desires we share through word and actions both in our individual lives and as the Church working together in this mission field that is our neighborhood. At these times we need to let Him define what Victory is. While we remain faithful repentant disciples that share His wonderful words of love and forgiveness and leave the life changing work to Him. May His words of comfort, grace, and forgiveness that have the power to change lives be the power that guards your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen