

1 Kings 19.1-18

Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I don't make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time!"

When he saw that, he arose, and ran for his life, and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there. But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree. Then he requested for himself that he might die, and said, "It is enough. Now, O God, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers."

He lay down and slept under a juniper tree; and behold, an angel touched him, and said to him, "Arise and eat!"

He looked, and behold, there was at his head a cake baked on the coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank, and lay down again. God's angel came again the second time, and touched him, and said, "Arise and eat, because the journey is too great for you."

He arose, and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, God's Mountain. He came to a cave there, and camped there; and behold, God's word came to him, and he said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

He said, "I have been very jealous for God, the God of Armies; for the children of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away."

He said, "Go out, and stand on the mountain before God."

Behold, God passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains, and broke in pieces the rocks before God; but God was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake; but God was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake a fire passed; but God was not in the fire. After the fire, there was a still small voice. When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle, went out, and stood in the entrance of the

cave. Behold, a voice came to him, and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

He said, "I have been very jealous for God, the God of Armies; for the children of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away."

God said to him, "Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus."

I have been playing with an idea about life from my reading of the Bible and my observations of life. This idea is that people are most often struck and even break at their strongest points. My thought is that the greatest failures in my life – and in others – occur at the point where my character is arguably the most developed.

Moses was a shy and curious person who never sought leadership and tried to help God find others to lead his people. But it was also Moses in the wilderness who steps in at one point to take command away from God. He speaks before consulting God.

The apostle John was a gentle and loving man. He was quiet and reflective. But it is John who in a moment of intolerance asked Jesus to call fire to destroy a Samaritan village.

The apostle Peter is a man of great strength and courage. But twice he acts the coward and denies Jesus.

Judas may be grouped with these others. Throughout his time with Jesus he was concerned about the poor and proper stewardship of the money belonging to the little band. But he is the one who is bought to betray Jesus.

Watch out for your strong points. It is here where your greatest failures may occur.

So it was with Elijah. Elijah stood before a pagan king and queen and rebuke them. He stood alone against the priests of the false God alone. He was brave. He was a man of iron and thunder, who seem to be above any human weakness. But he was tested at his strongest point.

Pursued by King Ahab and Queen Jezebel, he ran into the rocky desert of Sinai. He threw himself on the ground and gave way to despondency and hopelessness. You and I can certainly share at times the despair, the hopelessness, the fear that Elijah felt. You and I have experienced the desert and the spiritual hunger.

Elijah was to the point where he said to God, “It is enough. Let me die.”

But God did not leave Elijah despondent or hopeless or fearful. And he doesn't leave us that way either.

Now there is a way to avoid these feelings of being deserted, of being spiritually dry. Get rid of your ambitions and your dreams. Compromise your ideals. Don't seek to develop a closer walk with Jesus. And you will find many of your afflictions will disappear.

One of my takeaways from Dr. Drummond's class on evangelism in seminary was his statement: "Start reading the Bible, going to worship, and praying; and the devil will come after you. If you don't do those things, the devil will leave you alone; because he's won anyway."

Elijah had started off life as an insignificant person with no great purpose. He had no great calling from God. He could've easily escaped his despair and hopelessness. It was his devotion to God that brought him into conflict with the political and spiritual powers of his world.

So the first thing I realize when I am despond and were spiritually warned is that it is a sign that God and I are together, and that God is at work in my life and through my life.

The way of the early Methodists in England in the mid-1700s was not an easy one. John Wesley was excluded from church pulpits so he preached in church cemeteries or at the entrances to mines or outside the factories. Many times ruffians would be hired by community leaders to harass Wesley and the other Methodist preachers. They would howl and shout, beat drums and pots and pans, and throw rotten vegetables, handfuls of dirt, and even rocks.

One time there was a period of relative peace and Wesley began to wonder why there was no opposition anymore. He began to worry that he was not following where God was leading. Then one day he was hit in the head by a piece of brick. He picked himself up and lifted his voice: “Praise God. I’m on the right path!”

And I don’t know if I could immediately have gone to praising God in that situation; but hopefully you get my point. Opposition and conflict are sometimes indications that we are on the right path.

I don’t encourage you to seek out a brick to the head or its virtual equivalent. But I do encourage you to see beyond the immediate opposition.

Often times it isn't the external strain or punishment that gets to us anyway; but the inner sense of inadequacy to meet the challenge.

What is it that really worries us – deep down. Is it not our concern – even our panic – that we cannot meet the challenge. That we won't have enough to prevail.

The life and he falls him. He surrenders to fear. He is afraid that he will not be able to match up against the power of the king and queen and the false religion.

God deals with – should I have said heels – the deep spiritual despondency of Elijah. And he deals with hours, too. How does God work?

God says to Elijah, “Go out and stand on God’s mountain.”

And Elijah stands on the mountain peak. He sees the rocky canyons below, and the jagged crests around him. There are wide stretches of rock and sand. It appears to be the loneliest place on earth.

Then a wind roars down through the passes and send sand slipping across the face of the mountain and covers everything with a grain missed. And then the earth shakes and cliques. The mountains tremble. Great cracks open in the earth. Rocks cascade to the desert

floor. And then lightning splits the sky and light flashes on the peaks. Fire and fumes and smoke curl from burning rock.

Elijah covers his face. “Oh that God would speak so to other men... Send his whirlwind, earthquake, and fire... Crush the evil and bring victory to the good... Annihilate the immoral and burn the rebellious!”

Then there is silence. A still small voice as quiet as a whisper speaks in the soul of Elijah. “What are you doing here Elijah?”

Then Elijah understands. He turns from the violence he wanted God to bring back to the faithfulness which he had lost. What are you doing here Elijah?

Elijah did not have all the answers at that moment. He did not yet know how he was to meet King Ahab and Queen Jezebel. He did not yet know how he could over, all the power arrayed against him. But at that moment he did know that he would go back to the old arena and confront them.

And life is like that. We may not see clearly the gate through which we need to go, but we do see an opening, a light that tells us this is the way and that is not the way. Many things about the future may be uncertain that we may know one thing: God is with us.

What you doing here Elijah?

That question reminds me of the first verses of the Book of Acts. Acts, as you know is the continuation of the Gospel of Luke. The disciples at the end of Luke have been through many emotions – the elation of the entrance into Jerusalem, the quiet of the Last Supper, the fear of Gethsemane and the arrest, the terror and loss of the crucifixion, and the confusion at first, but then the confidence and elation of the resurrection.

The risen Jesus had come to them, and been with them. And he gave them a purpose – his purpose – to tell the world of God's love in Jesus Christ. Then Jesus begins to leave them. We see them in the first verses of Acts watching Jesus as he rises to heaven – taken up in the

cloud. They stand and stare unable to move. Then there is a voice behind them that asks, “Why are you standing there?”

There is no real answer except to stop standing and get on with what God would have us do. How do we know what God would have us do?

Well, God took Elijah up to the mountains to talk with him – to pray. I think that is really how we know. To go off to pray and to hear the quiet voice. And then stop standing and get going.

I can be assured of one thing when I am despondent and troubled. God and I will talk and I will get back to joining God and what he has to do.

It is comforting to me that the great saints face the same challenges – the same inner struggles – that I do. But it is much more comforting to know that God will whisper to me when I don't know where to go; and I can get going again.