

Meeting God in the Wilderness



Meditations on Elijah in 1 Kings 19

Lent 2018

Introduction

Elijah is repeatedly addressed in Scripture as “man of God”. And a man of God he was. But Elijah was first a man, a human being, a fleshly creature. We often accord acclaim to the men and women of the Bible that borders on the extravagant. We bestow on them qualities that belong to divinity rather than humanity. But the men and women of the Bible were just that, men and women. They were human beings. They were fallible, fallen creatures. And in that truth we can find great hope for ourselves. When we recognize that God could use Moses and David, who were both murderers, to lead His chosen people it gives us hope. When we look at bumbling Peter who suffered from foot-in-mouth syndrome, and when the chips were down denied even knowing Jesus, we can be encouraged that God might be able to use us too. And though there are those who want to make Mary a “co-redeemer” with Jesus, she showed her humanity in Mark 3:21 when she and Jesus’ brothers went out to rescue Him from looking foolish, “for people were saying, ‘He is beside himself’”.

Like these others, Elijah was a man. Yes, a man of God, but first he was a man. Many mighty miracles were done through him, but as we will see in these meditations this Lenten Season, he was also prone to human emotions such as depression, fear, despair, and self-pity. In a nutshell, Elijah was human. And it is in his humanness that we find fodder for meditations on how to deal with our own human weaknesses. How did God break through Elijah’s pity party to bring him to a place of faith and obedience? What can we learn from him that will help us draw closer to God and learn to trust Him?

The story of Elijah fleeing to the wilderness has all of the elements of a Lenten pilgrimage. He journeyed 40 days and 40 nights. He fasted. He first ran from, then earnestly sought God. He argued with God. He listened, looked, and learned. Though he was deeply confused, discouraged and scared, he received correction, clarity, encouragement, and hope from our Lord. God did not remove the problem which prompted Elijah’s fear and discouragement, He forced Elijah to face those fears and his problem head on. As a result Elijah turned around—which is what the word “repent” means—and went with God, in the power of the Spirit, to face his tormentors.

Elijah's hasty retreat to the wilderness was precipitated by one of his greatest triumphs. In chapter 18 of 1 Kings, a contest is held on Mount Carmel between Elijah and 450 prophets of Ba'al. Elijah challenges the prophets saying, "you call on the name of your god and I will call on the name of the Lord; and the God who answers by fire, he is God". His opponents cried to Ba'al, but there was no answer from heaven. Then Elijah prayed, "Answer me, O Lord, answer me, that this people may know that thou, O Lord, art God." After his prayer, "the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt offering, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, 'The Lord, he is God; the Lord, he is God.'" The prophets of Ba'al were seized and all 450 were killed.

King Ahab told his wife, Jezebel, what had happened and this infuriated the heretical queen. She vowed to slay Elijah, and this prompted the prophet's decision to flee to the wilderness for his own safety. Elijah had done everything that the Lord had asked, and the Lord received the glory. So, why would God, who destroyed the evil prophets, let Jezebel kill him? He despairs: God is fickle. He is capricious. It is simply not fair! It is so easy for us to go there. And when we do go there we often find ourselves, like Elijah, in a pit of despair. And so Elijah runs. Is that not what we so very often do when the tough times come and it seems God has turned a deaf ear?

I encourage you to read the story of the contest on Mount Carmel before launching on this journey into the wilderness with Elijah. Then let us run together with Elijah and discover how God meets us in the wilderness. We will learn that God really is in control, and that we can never run beyond God's gracious reach. He wants to teach us that, though we encounter frightening obstacles and seemingly insurmountable problems in our lives, running from them accomplishes nothing. God's miraculous intervention does occur. If we will but ask, seek and wait upon the Lord, He will meet us in our wilderness wanderings.

Elijah's journey is our journey. Let us walk with him through the wilderness and encounter the Lord together at Mount Horeb.

Ash Wednesday, February 14

Jezebel's Messenger

Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "So may the gods do to me and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of [the prophets of Ba'al] by this time tomorrow." (1Kings 19:2)

Jezebel: her name is synonymous with wickedness. Compared to other women of the Bible she is not a heroic fighter like Deborah, a devoted sister like Miriam or a cherished wife like Ruth. Jezebel cannot even be compared with the Bible's other wicked women—Potiphar's wife, or Delilah—for no good comes from Jezebel's deeds. These other women may be bad, but Jezebel is the worst. In World War 2, American military engineers at Los Alamos were trying to develop a missile which could carry a nuclear warhead. They named the project "Jezebel", for it was hoped that she would bring down an empire. Jezebel was the most wicked of women.

She was a powerful force. Not someone you wanted to cross. Even King Ahab feared his wicked wife. So, why did she send a messenger to Elijah instead of an assassin? She could have arranged for a whole garrison of soldiers to dispatch the prophet. Why give him warning? Because for all that Jezebel was seemingly all powerful, she feared the people. She wanted Elijah to flee. If she killed him, the people would turn against her.

Elijah was popular. The people revered him. He had saved all Israel when he ended the three and half year drought (1 Kings 17:1, 18:41-45; James 5:17-18). Nevertheless, when Jezebel's messenger delivers her ultimatum, Elijah knows she is capable of fulfilling her threat. She has already "killed the prophets of the Lord" (1 Kings 18:14). Popular or not, Elijah is afraid. He runs.

What fears, imagined or real, prompt us to run from God's call? The devil has messengers. He sends his dark angels to us with messages of fear. Do we hearken to the message? Or do we rebuke those messengers, and renounce the fear?

Thursday, February 15

Elijah's Fear

[Elijah] was afraid, and he arose and went for his life... (1 Kings 19:3a)

Elijah was afraid. He was afraid of dying. He was suffering. He suffered a fear of death, and in that, Jezebel won. Fear won. Evil triumphed. There are some things worse than death. Fear of death is one of those things. Terrorists know this. Edgar Allan Poe played on this truth in stories such as “The Pit and the Pendulum” and “Premature Burial”. When the fear of death takes control of our thoughts we die multiple deaths. The title character in William Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* says, “Cowards die many times before their deaths. The valiant never taste death but once. Of all the wonders that I yet have heard, it seems to me most strange that men should fear, seeing that death, a necessary end, will come when it will come.” (*Shakespeare, Julius Caesar Act II, Scene 2*)

Fear immobilizes us. Phobias come in many guises. For example, one of the primary reasons people do not share their faith with others is fear. We are afraid of rejection, of persecution, of having our lack of knowledge of the faith exposed. Indeed, to evangelize is to say what the world offers is insufficient. This might seem offensive to someone, and that might well expose us to ridicule or rejection. So, in our fear, we say nothing.

Fear causes us to put the focus on ourselves. Elijah had been faithfully carrying out the prophetic ministry to which he had been called. And he had been enormously effective. But the fear of death quickly extinguished the fire of his zeal. The fear of death stole his heart from God and focused it on himself.

What are your fears? How have those fears immobilized you? St. John tells us that “There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear” (1 John 4:18). Let God’s love cast out whatever fears are at work in you. For where His love is, there is no room for fear.

Friday, February 16

Elijah Leaves His Servant in Beersheba

[Elijah] came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there. (1 Kings 19:3b)

Beersheba is the most southerly inhabited village in Judah. Moving south from there one enters the Negev, then the vast Sinai desert. It was to that desolate wilderness that Elijah was headed. And he needed to experience that journey alone, so leaving his servant in the village he pressed on into the desert.

Wilderness wandering is a personal journey. Yes, the whole people of Israel wandered in the wilderness forty years, but the majority of wilderness experiences recounted in Scripture are solo journeys. Moses encountered the Lord at the burning bush in the wilderness (Ex. 3:1f). Jesus was tempted by Satan in the wilderness (Mt. 4:1f), and He withdrew to the wilderness alone to pray (Lk. 5:16). John the Baptist *lived* in the wilderness (Lk. 1:80). The wilderness is a place for godly encounter. But the wilderness can also be a place of testing and temptation.

Besides the physical wilderness there are also wildernesses of our own making. We can get lost in the wilderness of sin. We can wallow in the wilderness of depression. Or we can die of spiritual thirst in the wilderness of material consumption. Though we drive ourselves into these wilderness places, without the Lord we can never emerge from them. In Michael Card’s song “In the Wilderness”, he declares that it is the Lord who “gives grace sufficient to survive any test. And that's the painful purpose of the wilderness.”

Whether it is God who drives us into the wilderness, as He did Jesus (Mark 1:12), or it is a journey of our own making, our wilderness wandering is a time for us to have a personal encounter with the Lord. Ask Him for that grace in your Lenten journey.

Saturday, February 17

A Day's Journey into the Wilderness

[Elijah] himself went a day's journey into the wilderness... (1Kings 19:4a)

Compline is the last office of the day, the prayers we say before taking our rest for the night. It is a time to give thanks to God for the blessings of the day past, to assess the day's journey, confess the wrongs we have done and the opportunities missed, to offer supplications and intercessions for those we encountered, and to lay it all in the hands of the Lord for the night. The spiritual journey of the day is done.

We most often think of a journey as an act of traveling from one physical location to another. But every journey we take, as Christians, has a spiritual component as well. Elijah was on a physical journey into the wilderness, but he was also on a spiritual journey. Though he may have believed he was running from God, he soon found that he could never run so far. He thought God had abandoned him—had turned His face away. And so Elijah fled, and he unwittingly began a spiritual journey into the hands of God.

Henri Nouwen, in his book *The Dance of Life* says, “I am beginning now to see how radically the character of my spiritual journey will change when I no longer think of God as hiding out and making it as difficult as possible for me to find him, but instead as the one who is looking for me while I am doing the hiding...” Elijah was doing the hiding, God the looking.

Each day is a journey. How are we spending that day? Are we taking advantage of the opportunities, the blessings, that God affords us that day? Are we spending time in the presence of the Lord or running from Him? Elijah “went a day's journey into the wilderness” to hide. Are we making this day's journey one where we seek to find and be found by God? How will you assess your day's journey at Compline tonight?

The First Sunday in Lent, February 18

Elijah Rests under the Broom Tree

[Elijah] himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a broom tree... (1Kings 19:4b)

God must like vegetation. Even though Jesus cursed the fig tree as an object lesson for His disciples (Mk. 11:12-14), God likes trees and bushes. It appears that God likes to talk to people when they are in the presence of a tree or bush. In the garden of Eden God planted the tree of life and spoke to Adam and Eve there (Gen. 2:9,16). Abram planted a tree in Beersheba and there he “called on the Name of the Lord” (Gen. 21:33). God called to Moses out of a burning bush (Ex. 3:4). And God appointed a plant to shade Jonah outside of Nineveh and spoke to him about the great city (4:6-11). So, we should not be surprised that God would meet Elijah when he took shelter under a broom tree.

Even though Elijah was running away, fleeing his calling, God provided a way station along the journey so that Elijah could be refreshed and return to Him. God wanted to talk to Elijah, and He wants to talk to us. But are we listening.

Too often, we want a theophany, a dramatic sign that God loves us. But more often than not God speaks to us in the ordinary. He will show us His majesty in a beautiful sunset, His joy in the smile of a small child, His love in a comforting arm about our shoulder in a time of sorrow. We may be looking for a dramatic conflagration and miss the presence of the Lord in the bright flower on the azalea bush. For it doesn't have to be a burning bush to be a sign of the Lord's presence. With God, any bush will do.

In your wandering in the wilderness, are you actually looking for signs of God's presence, His love? They are all around us. Look up. Take a rest under the broom tree, and listen for the voice of God speaking in the everyday things of our world.

Monday, February 19

Elijah Asks God to Take His Life

...and he asked that he might die, saying, “It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am no better than my fathers.” (1 Kings 19:4c)

Elijah didn't want Jezebel to kill him. However, now that he has isolated himself from God and from others, he wants to die. He wants death, and life, on his own terms. Elijah's self-pity has taken him to the brink. He has become completely self-absorbed. He tells God that he is no better than his fathers, not because they were bad, but because they are dead—so God, make me dead!

Suicide is the most selfish thing a person can do. It is devastating to the ones we love, and it is a declaration that our sorrow and hurt is greater than anyone else's. The suicidal one proclaims to God, “I have the power to control my life, and I'll prove it by taking it.”

Elijah could not see the big picture, and in his self-pity he isolated himself from God and from others who might have had a more objective perspective. He made himself unaccountable to anyone, including the Lord. And in his selfish, self examination he convinces himself he has done nothing wrong. He has blinded himself to hope. He sees no other alternative, no way out of his seemingly desperate situation. He exclaims: “It is enough.”

We get burned out. We get discouraged and depressed from time to time. Even if we do not verbalize it, we often feel that we have had enough. And we isolate ourselves. The devil loves that! We say, “My job is a dead end. My children are too busy to care. My friends don't understand my pain. My body is wearing out. The society is going to hell in a hand basket. And besides, God doesn't care about me.” We declare: “It is enough.” We turn inward instead of heavenward. We give up on church, turn our friends away, and quit listening for God's voice. But He will “never leave you nor forsake you” (Heb. 13:5). You are not alone. You are loved. Don't isolate. Reach out to God and to your friends and family.

Tuesday, February 20

Elijah Lay Down and Slept

And [Elijah] lay down and slept under a broom tree... (1Kings 19:5a)

Sleep. Depression breeds sleepiness, and sleep promotes physical and mental health. That's just the way of God. He provides. When we are in need God is there. But Elijah is not ready to receive. He has had enough. His sleep is not by choice. He has run a day's journey, and his body rebels. For Elijah, sleep is not a decision, it is a physical necessity. It is involuntary.

Shakespeare's character Hamlet finds himself in comparable circumstances in the third act of the play by that name. In his famous soliloquy, the prince contemplating suicide says, “To die, to sleep--No more--and by a sleep to say we end the heartache, and the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to. 'Tis a consummation devoutly to be wished. To die, to sleep--to sleep, perchance to dream-ay, there's the rub.” Suicide sounds like such a simple way to “end the heartache.” But Hamlet notes that with sleep there are dreams, and these dreams “must give us pause.”

Dreams serve a multitude of purposes. It is the mind's way of processing the various events of our waking hours. They can be comforting, or troubling, and the gamut between. They are also one of the many means our Lord uses to speak to His people. Jacob dreamt of a ladder with angels ascending and descending from heaven (Gen. 28:12). Jacob's son, Joseph, had many prophetic dreams (Gen. 37f). At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream (1 Kgs. 3:5). Joseph was told in a dream that his betrothed, Mary, would give birth to the savior (Mt. 1:20). Peter was told in a dream to welcome the Gentiles into the Body (Acts 10:9f).

We don't know if Elijah dreamed, but it is safe to say that God would be wont to speak to the prophet by those means. Do you pay attention to your dreams? They might just be God's voicemail.

Wednesday, February 21

An Angel Touched Him

...and behold, an angel touched him... (1 Kings 19:5b)

When I was a teen one of my beloved parakeets died. My father, not knowing she had died, asked how she was doing. I broke down and began to cry. He didn't say a word to me. He simply wrapped me in a tight embrace and held me. I needed his touch. My father gave that to me, and Elijah's Father gave that to him.

In the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, angels visit people for a variety of reasons. The angels bring messages (Luke 1:11-13, 26-31; 2:10), do battle (Dan. 10:12-21; Rev. 12:7-9; Jude 9), rebuke the hearer (Num. 22:22f; Lk. 1:19-20), correct (Gen. 16:7-9), protect (Ps. 91:11), feed (1Kg. 19:7), and minister (Mt. 4:11). But this passage in 1 Kings is the only place in all of Holy Scripture where the angel touches the one visited. (In Acts 12:7, the angel who visits Peter in prison whacks him up the side of the head to get his attention. But that touch is not the purpose of the angel's visit.)

The book of Hebrews tells us that angels are “ministering spirits sent forth to serve, for the sake of those who are to obtain salvation” (1:14). Angels are tasked with taking care of us fallible human beings. There are needs which must be met and it is the angel’s job to minister to those needs. Elijah had a need. He was alone. And though his isolation was by choice he still needed to know that he was not abandoned.

Humans are relational beings. We need community. We need other people in our lives. Even the introvert and loner needs to know that he or she is not alone, isolated, and abandoned. Elijah needed to know. Sometimes words are superfluous. God could have sent a text message of sorts — a prophetic word. But what Elijah needed was a physical being present with him. He needed to be touched. His Father sent an angel, and he touched him.

Thursday, February 22

The Message of the Angel

...an angel touched him, and said to him, “Arise and eat.” (1 Kings 19:5c)

As we mentioned yesterday, angels minister to the saints in many and varied ways. Elijah needed a touch. He needed to know that he was not alone, and the angel touched him. But he was also in need of physical sustenance, and now the angel says, “Arise and eat.” Elijah might have argued that he was fasting, but the reality of the situation was he was depressed, and the depressed often shun food thereby exacerbating their forlorn situation.

Fasting has its place in the spiritual disciplines. It is considered a holy obligation in many liturgical churches, and often practiced in many Protestant churches. The Puritans called fasting a “soul-fattening” exercise. But what is it? Fasting is not like a spiritual ‘hunger strike’. We do not and cannot compel or obligate God to act on our behalf. God is sovereign. We fast to seek God, not to manipulate Him. Fasting is something prescribed and practiced in both Old and New Testament—it has its place (Is. 58:6-9; Mt. 6:5-18).

But the body is a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19). We need to take care of the body, treat it with respect, nourish it. Self-serving fasting, as Elijah was doing, is harmful to body and spirit. We need to know when to “arise and eat”. According to the Roman Catholic bishops there are “those that are excused from fasting and abstinence...[including] the physically or mentally ill..., individuals suffering from chronic illnesses such as diabetes...also pregnant or nursing women. In all cases, common sense should prevail, and ill persons should not further jeopardize their health by fasting.” We are to wisely care for our bodies.

All human life is sacred. We are created in the image of God. Our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit. Are you protecting and nourishing God’s temple?

Friday, February 23

He Looked

And he looked, and behold, there was at his head a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water. (1Kings 19:6a)

“He looked.” How often do we miss something significant because we simply didn’t look? A number of years ago I had the opportunity to do a tandem parachute jump with an Army Ranger. One of the men who made the jump with me handed me a disposable camera and told me, “Don’t miss the opportunity to record this for posterity.” I told him that I didn’t want to miss the experience by seeing my jump through the view finder of a camera. A photograph, or the view through a lens, cannot compare to the unrestricted panorama from 10,000 feet. I didn’t miss the vista. I looked and I witnessed the grandeur of God!

St. John didn’t miss his opportunity either. When, “on the Lord’s Day,” he was “in the Spirit” (Rev. 1:10), John looked, and all of heaven was opened to him. He had a revelation. In chapter 4, John says, “I looked, and lo, in heaven an open door!” And through that door John saw all of the magnificence of the heavenly worship, the multitude standing before the throne, the Lamb, the Temple, and much more. The heavenly vision is always there, but we see only if we look. John took the time to look, and he was rewarded for it.

Elijah had to look to receive the blessing the angel had brought to him. He would have missed the gift if he had not raised his eyes to see. God’s provision is always there. But are we looking for it? Whether it is bread to nourish our bodies, or divine revelation for our spirit that God is providing, it is easy for us to get distracted by the things of this world. Too often we are looking at things through the earthly view finder. Take the time to look through the open door of heaven. Do not miss out on the opportunities and provision given to us by God.

Saturday, February 24

Elijah Ate, Drank, and Slept

And he ate and drank, and lay down again. (1Kings 19:6b)

In 1943, Abraham Maslow presented his famous hierarchy of needs in an article entitled “A Theory of Human Motivation”. He theorized that until a person secured his or her basic physiological requirements, the higher needs would remain elusive. The ground level needs, according to Maslow are: air, water, food, shelter, and sleep. Elijah had spiritual needs, but these would remain unmet until his physiological needs were satisfied. The angel was sent to meet those needs. Elijah had air. The broom tree provided shelter. The angel had given him food and drink. Now he needed sleep.

It is interesting that the food the angel provided was “a cake baked on hot stones”. This is a traditional dish cooked on hot stones with hot ashes scooped over the cake to speed cooking. It was a simple quick meal. For example, when the angels visited Abraham he told Sarah to “Make ready quickly three measures of fine meal, knead it, and make cakes” (Gen. 18:6). The sense is that the one for whom it is prepared is not going to stay long. The angel was telling Elijah, “I’ll prepare the cake because you won’t be here long. So, eat and sleep.” And Elijah “ate and drank, and lay down again.”

We are three-fold beings: mind, body, spirit. If one part of our being is hurting or undernourished, the other two parts suffer as well. For example, if our bodies are ill it affects our minds and spirit. Or if we do not stimulate the mind with study and learning, our spirit will suffer. If we neglect sleep, it negatively impacts both our body and mind, and our spirits remain less receptive. A person who is physically fit but misses worship and avoids Bible study is not whole. A person who studies the Bible but does not eat healthily is incomplete. A worshiper who is not physically fit or versed in the Bible is not loving God with his whole heart, mind, and spirit. Are you neglecting any part of your being?

The Second Sunday in Lent, February 25

The Angel's Second Visit

And the angel of the Lord came again a second time, and touched him...
(1 Kings 19:7a)

In 1893, Francis Thompson wrote a poem entitled, *The Hound of Heaven*. It is a long poem, too long to quote here, but it is a profound work. Fr. John Francis Xavier O'Conor, S.J. summarized the work this way:

The name is strange. It startles one at first. It is so bold, so new, so fearless. It does not attract, rather the reverse. But when one reads the poem this strangeness disappears. The meaning is understood. As the hound follows the hare, never ceasing in its running, ever drawing nearer in the chase, with unhurrying and imperturbed pace, so does God follow the fleeing soul by His Divine grace. And though in sin or in human love, away from God it seeks to hide itself, Divine grace follows after, unwearingly follows ever after, till the soul feels its pressure forcing it to turn to Him alone in that never ending pursuit.

God doesn't give up on us. We may seek to hide, as Elijah did, but "Divine grace follows after." Elijah had received the initial visitation of the angel, but did not immediately respond. And so, "the angel of the Lord came again a second time." "As the hound follows the hare...so does God follow the fleeing soul."

Has God visited you, given you a task, a mission, a calling? Have you answered? He will not give up on you. He will visit you again. He is the Hound of Heaven. The Lord promised through the prophet Jeremiah, "I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope" (29:11). Why is it then that we seem to constantly run from His calling? The way may be hard, but God's plan is for our "welfare and not for evil, to give [us] a future and a hope." Do not give up. God will never give up on you!

Monday, February 26

The Journey

The angel said, "Arise and eat, else the journey will be too great for you."
(1 Kings 19:7b)

What journey? Who said anything about a journey? The only journey Elijah thought he was on was one that took him far from God and the evil Jezebel. But God had other plans for him.

In many of Andrew Greeley's books he says, "God draws straight with crooked lines." The quote is not unique to him, but no one seems certain to whom the original citation may be given. Martin Luther, for example, used a similar quote, saying, "God draws straight lines with crooked sticks." The point, though, is this: God directs us toward the end that He has prepared for us, and often the route seems highly circuitous to us.

For me, God's direct route from Dallas to Asheville went through Houston. In order for me to be properly placed in Asheville, I had to spend 23 months at St. Thomas Episcopal Church in Houston. It certainly seemed like a detour at the time, and many years later I can safely say it was a necessary one in God's purposes and plan. Miranda's plans upon graduation from college in Rhode Island did not include a trip to Austin, Texas. Nevertheless, after meeting the Lord, suddenly a move to Texas was on the agenda. That detour was God's plan, not her's.

Elijah needed to be in the wilderness in order to hear clearly from God. It appeared to be a detour, but once all of the pieces came together it was obvious that God had drawn a straight line for the prophet which included a circuitous trek through the desert.

We don't know where the journey leads, or what it will entail when we embark on that path with God. But as Stephen Curtis Chapman says, "Saddle up your horses...This is a life like no other, whoa whoa this is the great adventure."

Tuesday, February 27

Forty Days and Forty Nights

And [Elijah] arose, and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights... (1 Kings 19:8a,b)

If a day's journey is approximately 20-25 miles, then Elijah could have easily traveled between 800 and 1,000 miles during his forty days. It is only 200 miles from Beersheba to Mt. Horeb, but Elijah took forty days to get there. And it is only about 300 miles from Egypt to Jericho, and it took Israel forty YEARS to make that trip.

In Biblical terms, "forty" is not an exact number. It is a number that designates "a long time". For example, according to Genesis, when Noah was in the ark, "rain fell upon the earth forty days and forty nights" (7:12). And when Moses went up on the mountain to receive the 10 Commandments, he "was on the mountain forty days and forty nights" (Ex. 24:18). Also, we read in Matthew 4:2 that when Jesus was in the wilderness, "He fasted forty days and forty nights." In each of these cases, the time spent was not necessarily a literal forty days and nights; it was "a long time."

When we are dealing with God it often seems that God is very SLOW about the details. But as St. Peter reminds us, "with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow about His promise as some count slowness, but is forbearing toward you..." (2 Peter 3:8-9). And so it is that when we are waiting on God, one day may seem like forty, or it may seem like a thousand years!

God is not worried about time, we are. He can see the big picture, and that is His concern. He has a kingdom perspective, one we cannot see. He may seem to be taking His time about answering our prayers, but as Peter reminds us, "the Lord is not slow about His promise". God is "forbearing toward you". Are you willing to wait on the Lord?

Wednesday, February 28

Horeb, the Mountain of God

...he went ...to Horeb the mount of God. (1 Kings 19:8c)

There is some confusion about the name of the "Mountain of God". In some places it is referred to as Horeb, and in others as Sinai. Moses saw the burning bush on "Horeb, the mountain of God" in Exodus 3. But later, in chapter 24, it says that "Joshua, and Moses went up into the mountain of God...[and] the glory of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai" (vv. 13,16). The mount is probably the same piece of rock, but varied traditions appear to have given it different names. Regardless, Elijah wanted to travel to a place where he was certain that God would make a visitation. He wanted to go to the "mount of God".

People have inevitably been drawn to high places in search of the divine. One of the reasons Asheville is so popular with New Age seekers is that it is surrounded by mountains. For example, on the website "Vortex Hunters" it says, "There are twenty-four active vortices between Black Mountain and Waynesville.... This is one of the most concentrated number of vortices and power points anywhere in this country...over 24 major ones! ... Mt. Pisgah is the major power spot of the area, where the Watcher, or Guardian Angel of this entire area resides."

In the Bible, mountains are not necessarily tall. For example, Mount Zion in Jerusalem is only 2500 ft above sea level. That is equivalent to the elevation of Asheville. And the Temple Mount was built on fill dirt so that it was higher than the surrounding land. It is elevated only about 60 feet. What makes a mount significant is that it is a place of encounter. In their song, "Mountain of God", Third Day says, "I thought that I was all alone, Broken and afraid, But, You are here with me." We go to the mountain to be with God. Without doubt there are high, holy places. But when we are searching for God, the highest place may be on our knees.

Thursday, March 1

The Cave

And there [Elijah] came to a cave... (1 Kings 19:9a)

A cave is a great place to hold a pity party. Elijah may have been trekking to the Mountain of God, but once he arrived he went back to his depressed state. He traveled to the mountain, but he “came to a cave”.

A cave is not necessarily a physical enclosure, it can be a state of mind or spirit. When we close in on ourselves and shut out our loved ones and God, we create a cave—a prison of our own making. We think that in this cave we can find safety from outside threats. But in reality, the greater threat may be that which comes from within. For as Jesus said, “What comes out of a man is what defiles a man. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, fornication, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within...” (Mk 7:20-23).

Twice in the Psalms David declares that when God rescued him, He brought him forth “into a broad place” (Ps. 18:19; 31:8). God does not want to keep His people penned up or bound. The prophet Malachi declares, “But for you who fear my name the sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in its wings. You shall go forth leaping like calves from the stall” (4:2).

We create caves in which we can shelter, thus creating the illusion of safety. Sometimes we seek refuge in drugs or alcohol. We can seek to hide in obsessive use of the internet or social media. We cower in the darkness of the cave of our fears, or drown ourselves in the noise of the 24 hour news cycle, telling ourselves that this is reality and we need to stay informed. The reality is that God wants to deliver us from the darkness of the caves. What caves have you created for yourself? Ask God to deliver you to a “broad place”.

Friday, March 2

Lodging in the Wilderness

And there he came to a cave, and lodged there... (1 Kings 19:9b)

God can make a dwelling place for us in the wilderness. He knows something of lodging in wilderness regions. For forty years our Lord’s Presence was found in a tent in the wilderness while Israel made its way to the Promised Land. And in the Gospel of John we are told that “The Word became flesh and made His lodging with us...” (1:14). He began His incarnational trek in a stable and ended it in humiliation on the hard wood of a cross. He knows our need, and He Himself provides for our every necessity. He is our shelter.

The Psalmist declares, “Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations” (Ps. 90:1). And in the book of the Revelation we are told that for those who come out of the great tribulation, “He who sits upon the throne will shelter them with his presence” (7:15). He is our refuge in times of trial and tribulation. In the Scriptures we are repeatedly commanded to His care and protection. For example, in Psalm 57:1 the Psalmist cries out to God, saying, “in thee my soul takes refuge; in the shadow of thy wings I will take refuge, till the storms of destruction pass by.”

We need not be afraid, for He “will never leave you, nor forsake you” (Heb. 13:5). This is a promise reiterated in Revelation: “Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them...” (Rev. 21:3). Even though we may feel abandoned and desolate, Our God is with us and will shelter us.

Elijah was a desperate man. He was alone, tired, scared. He felt exceedingly vulnerable. “He came to a cave and lodged there.” God, Who had provided food and water for him, now provided shelter—a dwelling. When you feel vulnerable do you take refuge in the shadow of His wings? He is our dwelling place.

Saturday, March 3

How Does the Word of God Come to Us?

...and behold, the word of the Lord came to him... (1 Kings 19:9c)

Elijah had been a busy man. Since his resounding victory at Mt. Carmel he had been threatened with murder, fled with his servant, transported his servant to safety, eaten one light meal, wandered in the desert for many weeks, and only now stopped long enough for God to speak to him. Elijah had been a busy man, but not about the business of God. His mind was firmly fixed on the earthly matters at hand. There was not time given to God, or room in his spirit to receive His Word.

We are busy people. We get very busy with the things of this world. Many of these things are important, necessary for careers, the care of family, or health of body. And some of these things can be significantly time consuming. But in the midst of our busyness do we make time for the Lord? It is important for us to take time to listen, to carve out time in each day to spend with the Lord. Time not just to talk to God, but “wasting” time listening for His Word to come to us.

Have you ever tried to listen to a radio that is improperly tuned? Even if you can hear the broadcast, if the radio is not fine tuned there is static. Far too often our communication with God is like that. We try to squeeze in time for God, and in our rush to “make time for God” we do not get properly tuned in and we have trouble hearing Him. There is static on the line.

Though Elijah had been busy and running, he now settled down in a quiet place. The static was gone and “the Word of the Lord came to him”. The Lord had been pursuing him and trying to speak to him (witness the angel’s ministrations). But only now in the quiet time did Elijah actually hear the Lord. Do you make quiet time for the Lord to speak to you in the midst of your busy schedule?

The Third Sunday in Lent, March 4

“What Are You Doing Here?”

...the word of the Lord came to him, and he said to him, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” (1 Kings 19:9d)

The story is told of Rabbi Akiva, a first century Jew, who would engross himself in meditation on Scripture as he walked. One day he was so taken with the Word that he got lost and found himself outside a Roman fortress. The guard on the wall asked, “Who are you? What are you doing here?” Rabbi Akiva was startled. He said, “Repeat that.” “Who are you? What are you doing here?” the guard repeated. Rabbi Akiva looked up at the young man and said, “How much do you get paid to ask me these questions?” The guard answered, “Two drachma a week.” Rabbi Akiva said, “I will pay you twice that amount if you stand outside my house and ask me those two questions every morning.”

Rabbi Akiva understood that these two questions are the foundational questions of our life. The first is the question of our identity, the second concerns our purpose in life. “Who are you?” seeks the answer to what we understand about our identity as a child of God and heir to the Kingdom. “What are you doing here?” asks why God has placed us here at this specific time and place. It seeks the answer to what His purpose is for us.

God knew who Elijah was, and He knew why Elijah was in the cave. What He was doing was challenging the prophet to give an accounting of his purpose. God had called him to be a prophet, and to be obedient to that calling. The Lord could have just as legitimately asked, “Why are you being unfaithful to your calling? Did I tell you come here? How are you going to prophesy here?”

Who are you? You are a child of God, a son or daughter of the King. God has created you, called you, and equipped you for His ministry. Why are you here? What is it God wants to do through you today?

Monday, March 5

Zealous for God

*[Elijah] said, “I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts...
(1 Kings 19:10a)*

Translation from Hebrew to English is never easy and seldom neat. The word that the RSV translates as “jealous” in the verse above could very well be translated as “zealous”, and many English translations have rendered it so. There is no doubt that Elijah was very zealous for God. He proved so in the contest on Mt. Carmel. But now, his protestations ring a bit hollowly in the barren cave. He has allowed fear for his own life to have greater rule than zeal for the Lord. He is no longer walking in obedience to the Lord. Zeal without obedience becomes zealotry.

It has often been my contention that new converts to the Christian faith need to be locked up for at least 18 months before they are let loose on the Church. Their zeal is unbounded. They want everyone to experience the Lord just as they have. And they are going to badger us until we do! Their zeal is fanatical. And sadly, many of these zealous converts will not listen to more mature Christians, or to the leadership of the Church. They have become imbued with zealotry. They are not walking in obedience, and as a result many get deeply wounded.

David prayed, “Make me to know thy ways, O Lord” (Ps. 25:4). And Isaiah prophetically declared, “My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor your ways my ways, says the Lord” (Is. 55:8). God does not convert us and then launch us to carry out His mission in our zeal, doing it, as Sinatra would sing, “my way”. Our conversion is the launch pad to send us into the orbit of submission to His ways. We are called into greater and greater heights of obedience to Him, because it is only in relationship to Him that our zeal will ring true and be effective in proclaiming His Kingdom. For the Kingdom will come only when the King is on the throne.

Tuesday, March 6

The People of God

...the people of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thy altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword... (1 Kings 19:10b)

Many years ago, I was in a grocery store picking up a dozen eggs. As I examined the cartons, a man walked up to me, told me that I was a disgrace, that the Church had done more harm to mankind than good, then he spat on me and walked quickly away. I have no idea what was behind this attack, but it is obvious that I represented some hurtful deed, either perceived or real, that had been visited upon him. Unfortunately, it is often far easier for us to see what we perceive as wrong than to focus on what is right.

“The people of Israel” are God’s own people. Chosen by God. Dwelling in covenant relationship with Him (Deut. 7:6). And yet, Elijah could not focus on these blessings. He condemned the People of God. He could only see what he perceived as the great faults of God’s chosen people.

Sadly, this litany of wrongs done by the people of Israel is Elijah’s response to God’s question, “What are you doing here Elijah?” It is a classic avoidance technique: “I don’t have a legitimate answer for my questionable behavior, so I’ll throw accusation against these others to draw attention to them and their wrongs.”

The people of God were not without fault. But, whose role is it to find fault? The Church, “God’s Own People” (1 Pet. 2:9), is not without fault, and sadly, most of us are very quick to point out the shortcomings we see in our brothers and sisters. But the truth is, the fault we find in another is likely one we ourselves possess.

This Lenten Season is not a time to be looking at others and finding fault in them. This is a gifted time for us to do some serious self-examination. Ask God to reveal sins you may be oblivious to, and ask Him to cleanse your soul and spirit.

Wednesday, March 7

Isolation

I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away. (1 Kings 19:10c)

In a previous parish I had a parishioner whose husband did not attend worship with her. I went to visit the couple and asked him why he absented himself from church. He responded that he could worship just as well—even better—by himself. I replied that Jesus said, “Where two or three are gathered together, there am I in the midst of them” (Mt. 18:20). He said, “Well, when I worship there are always four of us present: me, the Father, Son, and Spirit.”

We can always make excuses for absenting ourselves from the Body of Christ. And like the husband of my parishioner, we can even come up with justification for our unrighteous separation. Regardless of our rationale, our isolation from the nurturing Presence of the Lord found in His Body and the communion of the faithful will result in spiritual deterioration and bitterness. And if we persist in this separation, we will find ourselves ultimately in rejection of our relationship with God. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews (10:24-25) exhorts us to “consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.” God called us into relationship with Him by calling us into the Godly fellowship of the Body of His Son. There is no such thing as solo-Christianity.

Elijah was convinced that he alone was in communion with God. He chose to isolate himself from the body of the faithful. Already in a depressed state, this further isolation, if left unchecked, would lead Elijah into desperation. It is a common human theme:

Nobody likes me, so I'm going to hide and lick my wounds.
Isolation amplifies the hurt. Have you isolated yourself from the Body? Reach out. Seek Christ in the community of faith, and “consider how to stir up one another...encouraging one another”.

Thursday, March 8

Go Forth!

And [the Lord] said, “Go forth...” (1 Kings 19:11a)

Many years ago, one of our bishops was preaching at the clergy Lenten retreat. His topic was the Great Commission (Mt. 28:18-20). After about 45 minutes he was still on the word “Go.” He looked around and said, “Stay tuned. We’ll get to ‘therefore’ tomorrow. And by Easter we might be able to get to the end of verse 19.”

What is it about “Go” that most of us don’t understand. We love the word “abide”, it is so much less threatening. But “Go” has implications of moving out of our comfort zone. We want to cry out, “Wait! I joined the Church to be comforted. I want to know God’s peace. I want to abide in Your Presence, Lord.” And He says, “Great! Climb on board and abide with me. I’m going out into all the world to proclaim the Kingdom. Come with Me.”

As we have seen in the meditations this week, Elijah has avoided dealing with his discouragement and depression. He ran to the cave to find peace and protection from evil. But there he became even more despondent; that is until he was confronted by God. “Why are you here?” Elijah could have replied, “To avoid my sacred responsibilities.” God does not try to reason with Elijah, He simply reiterates the prophetic calling: “Go forth...”

We make excuses for why we can’t go. “I don’t know the Bible well enough.” “I’ll look like a fool.” These and many others may be true statements, but the learning is in the doing. And the love of God is expressed in the simple reply “Yes, Lord”. You may argue that it’s too late, I missed my chance. But Jesus said the brother who told his father, “I will not go” but later repented and went, “did the will of his father” (Mt. 21:28-31). It is never too late to obey God, to say, “Yes, Lord” and go. He is gracious and merciful. Turn (or return) to Him today, and go with Him where He leads.

Friday, March 9

Stand on the Mount

*And [the Lord] said, “Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord.”
(1 Kings 19:11a,b)*

In his D-Day speech to the Third Army on June 5, 1944, General George Patton said, “My men don’t dig foxholes. Foxholes only slow up an offensive. Keep moving...I don’t want any messages saying ‘I’m holding my position.’ We’re not holding a [expletive] thing. We’re advancing constantly...” Modern warfare technique is what the Germans call *blitzkrieg*, literally “lightning war”. But God’s battle plan is much simpler. He says, “Stand”!

Elijah was in a battle, one that was both overt, contention with Jezebel, and internal, fighting depression and discouragement. The devil loved it. This was spiritual warfare, a multi-front attack by the enemy on God’s servant. And with the multi-front campaign, there were many temptations. Elijah could continue to run. He could remain hidden in the cave. He could take his own life.

But God said, “Go forth, and stand”. This is not a new technique for battling the enemy. In his battle against Moab, King Jehoshaphat was told, “You will not need to fight in this battle; take your position, stand still, and see the victory of the Lord” (2 Chron. 20:16-18). And in our battle against “principalities and powers in heavenly places”, we are instructed to “take the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore...” (Eph. 6:10-18). It sounds like inactivity, however, Paul makes it clear that we are to “keep alert”, clothed with armor, and that the battle is waged in prayer. He says, “Pray at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints...” (vs. 18). Be alert. Pray in the Spirit, for “the devil prowls around like a roaring lion” (1Pet. 5:8). The battle belongs to the Lord. Stand in Him, and see His victory.

Saturday, March 10

The Lord Passed By

And behold, the Lord passed by... (1 Kings 19:11c)

Bishop John Holloway used to say, “If you want to know how close your Father is, reach out your left hand. That’s how close Abba, Daddy really is.” Colossians 3:1 tells us that “Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.” And Hebrews 8:1 elaborates, saying, “we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven.” If you are baptized into Christ Jesus, and Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father, then Abba is seated just to your left. Reach out your hand. Abba, Daddy is that close.

Elijah’s struggle had been severe, but now the Lord had drawn near and spoken to him. Though he had had doubts about God’s provision and concern for his welfare, “behold, the Lord passed by”. The Lord was close at hand, and Elijah could call upon Him. God had been there all along, and had given signs of His love and care for Elijah, but the prophet could not receive them. But now, “behold, the Lord passed by.”

God had not forced the issue with Elijah. Even His initial query was mild: “Why are you here?” He wasn’t interested in brow-beating Elijah into obedience. And so His manifestation was not confrontational. “Behold, the Lord passed by.” God will not force you or manipulate you into relationship with Him.

The Psalmist says, “The Lord is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth” (Psalm 145:18). He is near, as near as your outstretched left hand. But are we looking for Him? Isaiah exhorts us to “Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near” (Isaiah 55:6). God hasn’t moved. Just as He was near to Elijah throughout his wilderness trek, so our Lord is near to us. But are we seeking? “Call upon Him while He is near.”

The Fourth Sunday in Lent, March 11 Encore?

...a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord... (1 Kings 19:11d)

As we begin the fourth week of Lent, the second half of the Lenten Season, we enter the heart of the story, Elijah's dramatic encounter with God. Here we witness a remarkable heavenly spectacle: wind, earthquake, and fire reminiscent of the contest on Carmel. Though the Lord had made Himself known on Mount Carmel in noteworthy fashion, He is not, as we shall see, in these events on Mount Horeb. But why? Why was He in the fire on Carmel, but not here? What is the message in this for us as we seek God in this Lenten season?

One of our greatest shortcomings as Christians is that we repeatedly cry out to God for an "encore". Moses fell victim to this temptation. At Horeb, there was no water and the people complained. God spoke to Moses and said, "Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, that the people may drink." And Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel" (Ex. 17:6). Then later at Kadesh they met a similar problem and Moses felt an encore was called for. But the Lord is not into encores, He desires obedience. This time there was to be no striking of the the rock. God said, "tell the rock before their eyes to yield its water; so you shall bring water out of the rock for them" (Num. 20:8). But Moses once again struck the rock and water came forth. God was displeased at his disobedience and barred him from the Holy Land.

For Elijah, now was a time to learn a new way, a way of gentleness in God's greatness. There is a time for the rod and time for the small voice. You may have witnessed God's hand in fire and want an encore. But He may want you to witness His glory in a more gentle way. Are you listening for Him, or crying encore?

Monday, March 12 The Lord Was Not in the Wind

...the Lord was not in the wind... (1 Kings 19:11e)

Sometimes the Lord is in the wind, and sometimes wind is just wind. Regardless of which it is, our Lord is Lord of the wind and waves (Mt. 8:27). He will use the wind as He pleases.

As we have noted, Elijah was a man of God. He knew the Word and he would have known the stories. Throughout the history of Israel God has used the wind to fulfill his purposes. After the flood, "God made a wind blow over the earth, and the waters subsided" (Gen. 8:1). As He delivered Israel from the clutches of Pharaoh, "the Lord drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night" (Exodus 14:21). And the Psalmist declares that God makes "the winds thy messengers" (Ps. 104:4). So surely this wind that Elijah could feel whipping across Mount Horeb was the Lord's messenger. But "the Lord was not in the wind."

How often we think we know God's purposes. How quick we are to declare something is from God (or alternately to give credit to the devil for some misfortune). Sometimes, the wind is just the wind. Sometimes my nasty head-cold is not an attack of the devil, it is just the result of being human and that I exposed myself to germs.

As we have already noted, our ways are not God's ways. And as St. Paul pointedly asks the Church at Corinth, "who has known the mind of the Lord?" (1 Cor. 2:16). Elijah didn't find the Lord in the wind, but he kept looking. When you don't find the Lord in whatever winds blow your way, do you throw up your hands? Blame it on the devil? Or do you keep looking?

Tuesday, March 13

Earthquake

*...and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake...
(1 Kings 19:11f)*

There are three cities which our Lord cursed: Bethsaida, Capernaum, and Chorazin. Matthew (11:20-24) tells us that Jesus “began to upbraid the cities, because they did not repent.” Each of these cities were destroyed in the years following our Lord’s earthly ministry. In the mid-fourth century Chorazin, which was situated in an active volcanic region, was destroyed by a massive earthquake. Was that the fulfillment of our Lord’s prophetic word over the city? Was the Lord in the earthquake?

Earthquakes are often viewed as vehicles for the judgment of God. Isaiah warns the residents of Jerusalem that “suddenly, you will be visited by the Lord of hosts with thunder and with earthquake and great noise...” (29:6). And the little apocalypse found in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21 tells us that the end times will be accompanied by “earthquakes in various places”. But the Lord also uses earthquakes to accomplish His productive purposes. When the women came to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus, “there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone” (Matt. 28:2). And after Paul and Silas were thrown in prison, “there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and every one’s fetters were unfastened” (Acts 16:26).

An earthquake can be the means of God’s judgment. Then again it could be His mode of deliverance. And sometimes it is just nature shaking the ground. Do not be quick to judge. Elijah was patient. When he didn’t find the Lord in the earthquake, he waited. In our impatience we want to see the Lord in every detail of our lives. But sometimes we need to wait for His Word. Will you wait?

Wednesday, March 14

Fire

...after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire... (1 Kings 19:12a)

I am a bit of a pyromaniac. The beauty of the flame, its flickering brightness, warmth, and unpredictability I find fascinating, even mesmerizing. I love candles (another good reason to be a priest), and forget those gas logs, I like a real fireplace! Fire: one of God’s greatest creations.

Those who live in California might not agree with me. Allowed to rage out of control, fire can consume everything in its path. This may be one the primary reasons fire is often associated with Hell. However, fire has positive purposes as well. We cook with it. It is used to purify a wide variety of substances, and it is used to consume waste. And fire is a common sign of God’s presence (e.g. the sanctuary candle above the tabernacle, and the paschal candle). The word fire appears 637 times in the Bible. God likes fire.

When Elijah saw the fire from inside the cave, all of these thoughts must have run quickly through his mind. Surely God is in the fire! “But the Lord was not in the fire.” On Carmel the Lord answered with an all-consuming fire. Undoubtedly Elijah thought, this is God’s clarion call. “But the Lord was not in the fire.”

Scripture declares that “our God is a consuming fire” (Heb. 12:29), and there are those who would declare that the horrific fires of 2017 in California were God’s judgment on that state. But fires rage every year in California, and fire is sometimes just fire. There was a storm raging outside Elijah’s cave. Fire may have been kindled by lightning. “But the Lord was not in the fire.” Elijah did not despair. He waited. God had passed by. He would make Himself known. Elijah began to realize that this is a test, and an effective one. It got his attention. Is God using a test to get your attention?

Thursday, March 15

Forerunners, Herald of the King

Then the earth reeled and rocked; the foundations also of the mountains trembled and quaked, because [the Lord] was angry. Smoke went up from his nostrils, and devouring fire from his mouth; glowing coals flamed forth from him. He bowed the heavens, and came down... (Psalm 18:7-9a)

As we have noted this week, there was wind, an earthquake, fire, and these were very effective attention-getters for the prophet. These preliminary signs were forerunners of the main event yet to come. And God was successful in getting the attention of the pouty, despondent prophet.

As we see in the Scripture above, David had experienced a comparable event while being pursued by King Saul. In a cave, hiding with his most trusted warriors, David experienced an earthquake and storm. The wind, earthquake, and devouring fire were forerunners announcing the Lord's Presence. After their appearance "He bowed the heavens and came down..." God was not in these events, they were given to announce His coming.

In Biblical times forerunners, sometimes called outrunners, were heralds of the king. They would run along beside the chariot of a king crying out to the populace, "Bow before the king!" The fiery, smoke-filled quaking that both David and Elijah experienced was a herald, an attention-getter for both men. And both paid attention and were delivered.

The Lord uses many types of forerunners to get our attention, and they are not always earth shaking events. Have you ever been reading Scripture and read a familiar passage when suddenly the light comes on and you get a glimpse of some truth that you had never noticed before? Or maybe you hear a turn of phrase that someone utters and it opens your eyes to a truth. What forerunners is God putting in your path this Lenten Season? Tune your senses. The King is in His chariot. Open your eyes to see Him.

Friday, March 16

Meeting God on the Mount

On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled. Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God...And Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire; and the smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain quaked greatly. (Exodus 19:16-18)

Elijah went up on the mount and met God there. Moses went up on the mount and met God there. "Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God." Jesus went up on the Mount, and He took Peter, James and John with Him, and they met the Father. They also saw Moses and Elijah, and God spoke to them from the cloud. Was it the same mountain for all three? Quite possibly. The mount itself, though, is not the focus here. Meeting God is.

It is not insignificant that these three events have similarities. There were storms, an earthquake, and fire in the first two. And there was a cloud that shrouded the mountain in the third. But of greatest interest is that Moses and Elijah appeared together with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration (Mt. 17:3; Mk. 9:4). Why?

After the Transfiguration, "the disciples asked him, 'why do the scribes say that first Elijah must come?' He replied, 'Elijah does come, and he is to restore all things; but I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not know him...' Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them of John the Baptist" (Mt. 17:10-13). Elijah was the messenger, Moses was the archetype of Messiah. Moses, like Jesus, was prophet, priest, and king. Each was a necessary forerunner of Christ, a herald of Messiah.

There have been forerunners in your Christian pilgrimage, important people who heralded Jesus, the Messiah, to you. Now is an excellent time for you to remember them before the Lord and to give thanks to God for their life and witness.

Saturday, March 17

The Voice of the Lord

*The voice of the Lord is powerful, the voice of the Lord is full of majesty.
(Psalm 29:4)*

In the movie Monty Python and the Holy Grail, when God appears to King Arthur and his knights, the heavens open and an old man with a long beard and crown speaks to the men in a booming, echoing voice. Unfortunately, this is a common misperception of how God speaks to his people. And there are those, even in the church, who believe that God no longer speaks directly to his people. They have bought the line from the psychiatrist and atheist Thomas Szasz: "If you talk to God, you are praying; if God talks to you, you have schizophrenia."

In Psalm 29, David describes the voice of the Lord speaking to his people through a thunderstorm rolling in from the Mediterranean across the Judean hills. David pictures the voice of the Lord as powerful enough to break the cedars of Lebanon, flashing forth lightning, and shaking the wilderness. It is no wonder that Elijah would expect God to speak through the wind, the earthquake, or the fire. But God was in none of these.

Do you have preconceived ideas of how God will speak to you? Or maybe you have questions as to whether God can speak to you. God knows our needs and our personalities. He knows how to speak to us in a way that we can hear His voice. But He wants us to listen. God wants to speak to us, He wants us to hear His voice. And like Elijah, God wants to teach us how to hear His voice in new and different ways.

During this latter half of our Lenten pilgrimage, let us listen for God in unique ways. He may speak to you through the thunderstorm, or the written word. But be alert to the possibility that God may be speaking to you in a much more subtle way.

The Fifth Sunday in Lent, March 18

A Still Small Voice

...and after the fire a still small voice. (I Kings 19:12b)

I am hard of hearing. In the many times I have been prayed over for healing of my hearing, the prophetic word that has repeatedly been given to me is that God is allowing me to lose my physical hearing in order that I might learn to hear His voice more clearly.

God has already spoken to Elijah once before in this wilderness wandering. It is not clear how God spoke to him previously or how Elijah heard the voice of God on previous occasions, but now God is speaking to him in a way that is apparently new to him. God is teaching Elijah how to listen more attentively.

The Hebrew for "still small voice" in this verse is literally a "sound of gentle stillness". The concept is that the sound of God's voice was so still that it could only be heard as a gentle vibration.

In Psalm 81:5, it says, "I hear a voice I had not known." This could be translated, "I hear God's most gentle whisper." When you are expecting a voice like James Earl Jones, but instead hear a "most gentle whisper" you might think that this could not be God. Later in the Psalm (vv. 11-13) it says, "But my people did not listen to my voice...Oh that my people would listen to me." God desperately wanted them to hear, but they didn't recognize Him. They had not yet learned to recognize His "still small voice".

God wants to teach us how to listen to him in a multitude of varied ways. His desire is that we would know him more intimately and learn to recognize Him in all of His manifestations. In order to hear him clearly we must learn to still the voices around us and to listen for the sound of his gentle whisper. In Psalm 46:10 God says, "Be still and know that I am God." God is speaking. Are you listening for His still small voice? Let Him teach you how to hear.

Monday, March 19

Elijah Wrapped His Face in His Mantle

*And when Elijah heard [the voice], he wrapped his face in his mantle...
(1 Kings 19:13a)*

As I said yesterday, I am hard of hearing, and even with state-of-the-art hearing aids, if there is any background noise I find it hard to hear or carry on a conversation. I do my best to blot out any distractions so that I can focus and concentrate on what I am trying to hear. For this reason I usually pray, praise, or listen to a sermon with my eyes closed. I find that helps my powers of concentration.

When Elijah heard the Lord's voice, "he wrapped his face in his mantle". There were many things vying for his attention. Did he hide his eyes to remove those distractions? There had been quite a cacophony raging on the mount, and now God was speaking in a quiet voice. Elijah needed all of his powers of concentration. It is possible the prophet wrapped his face in the mantle for fear, and certainly fear of the Lord was warranted. Elijah had sought the Lord in each prior event—the wind, earthquake, and fire—but this manifestation would require deep concentration. He knew it was the Lord, so he shielded himself from all distraction and listened.

We are busy people. We are constantly surrounded by a cacophony of our own. The world pushes at us from every quadrant: family, work, the news, self-indulgent pleasures. And through this distracting din God is speaking. He is calling to us in a still small voice, but we cannot hear, because we don't wrap our mantle about our faces to remove the distractions. We believe the lie that multitasking is both desirable and doable. That is double-mindedness. I cannot be occupied with this world and truly concentrate on the voice of God. St. James warns that "a double-minded man [is] unstable in all his ways, [and will not] receive anything from the Lord" (1:7-8). We need to set aside quality time to BE with the Lord. Remove the distractions, concentrate, listen.

Tuesday, March 20

Exiting the Cave

Elijah went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. (1 Kings 19:13b)

Elijah had already been told to "Go forth, stand" (vs. 11), but he was still hunkered down in the cave. There was wind and fire outside the cave, why would he want to go out there? All too often, we ourselves use a comparable argument to avoid confrontation with the Lord. If I get too close to the Lord He will make demands on me that I am unwilling to fulfill. I could get blown away, or burned up. His demands could shake me to the bone!

But "the Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in mercy." Yes, God may send His fire, but it will be to burn up the dross infecting our lives. His wind may come, but it will be to blow away the chaff. And He may shake us, rattle loose the debris cluttering the closets of our soul. Elijah needed to come out of the cave of his depression and despondency, but he could not do it alone. Neither can we. We need God. We need to come out of the cave, look to Him, listen, and respond.

One of the primary problems, born of our human nature, is that we want answers to our prayers on our terms. Elijah had a problem with Jezebel, and he wanted the Lord to fix *her*. God would take care of that situation, but in His good time. God was not talking to Jezebel. He deals with each one of us individually. He would deal with Elijah when the prophet took the first step out of the cave of his own self-indulgence, pity, and depression.

Are your prayers seemingly unanswered? What cave are you currently hiding in? Are you asking for healing of your body while your soul is wounded with bitterness? Is your prayer for restoration of a relationship not answered because you haven't acknowledged your wrong? God wants to meet you, but you must move out of the cave. Ask Him: "How may I exit this cave?"

Wednesday, March 21

What Have You Learned?

*And behold, there came a voice to him, and said,
"What are you doing here, Elijah?" (1 Kings 19:13c)*

A new young priest on his first Sunday in the parish preached a sermon entitled, “Love your neighbor as yourself”. The congregation loved it. The next Sunday he preached the same sermon again. The people agreed it was just as good as the first delivery. On the third Sunday he preached it again. The wardens met with him after the service and told him, “You have preached the same sermon three Sundays in a row. It is a good sermon, but we think you need to move on.” The young priest answered, “When you start loving your neighbor as yourself, then we can move on to the next topic.”

The Lord had the same question for Elijah as before (vs. 9). And that question was likely not to change until the Lord had received the honest answer He wanted to hear. But Elijah gave the same answer (vs. 14) as he had previously given to the Lord (vs. 10). The popular definition of insanity is “doing the same thing over and over expecting different results.” We want God to do something different, but we don’t change our unrighteous behavior. Truly, that is a bit insane. Until we have learned the current lesson, and change, we are not going to be ready for the next lesson.

There are a couple of ways for us to respond to our Lord when He appears to be badgering us with the same questions or challenges. Ask Him, “What is it that I am not doing that I need to be doing?” Or, “What and I doing that I need not be doing?” Ask your prayer partner, accountability partner, your pastor? God does not play games with His people. He wants us to grow and mature. He will NOT hide His purposes for you. But like the congregation of the new young priest, we need to learn the current lesson before God will move us forward to the next.

Thursday, March 22

Return!

And the Lord said to him, “Go, return...” (1 Kings 19:15)

In 1989, after a disastrous Episcopal diocesan convention, I went to the monastery and asked the Lord where He wanted me to go. At the convention the diocese had denied Jesus as the One Way, denied Scripture as the Word of God, endorsed abortion as acceptable birth control, and rejected heterosexual marriage as the norm. I told Him that I couldn’t be in a Church that denied Him and His Word. He said that He wanted me to return, that He was sending me to be a prophet in the midst of the darkness, and to “shine among them like stars in the sky as you hold firmly to the word of life” (Phil. 2:15-16). I was not pleased, but there was still work to do, and there were others who needed both an encouraging word and a place to go at the set time. I reluctantly returned.

Elijah could not have been pleased when the Lord told him to return. He had just told the Lord “the people of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thy altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away” (vs. 14). How could the Lord ask him to go back? Because there was still work to do, and as the Lord would tell him, there were over 7000 faithful people who were counting on the prophet to do that work!

Elijah did not have the big picture. From his limited perspective he was the only one who was faithfully following the covenant of the Lord. It is impossible for us to know what far-reaching impact our faithfulness can engender. I could have left the Episcopal Church alone, with my family. But what would I and so many others have missed? Elijah could have continued running, wandering afar. But what would Israel have missed if he had not returned? God doesn’t give us the big picture, and we don’t need it. We simply need to say, “Yes, Lord.” And go where He directs.

Friday, March 23

It's Not About You

"Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus; and when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael to be king over Syria; and Jehu...you shall anoint to be king over Israel; and Elisha...you shall anoint to be prophet in your place.
(1 Kings 19:15b-16)

Sometimes, when I pray, the Lord answers a question that I didn't ask. I will be sitting in my gazebo, or taking a week at the monastery, earnestly seeking the Lord about some concern I have about the parish and He starts talking to me about the diocese, or the seminary, or my attitude. It's not that God isn't listening, and doesn't care about my concerns. There is something else that He knows and I don't that I need to attend to. I want answers to the questions I'm asking, but God gently says, "This is not about you."

Elijah wanted resolution to the problem of the apostasy of Ahab and Jezebel and the threat to his personal well-being. God heard. But there were bigger issues that needed attention, matters affecting not only Israel, but the surrounding nations as well. God sees the big picture, and His concern is for all mankind.

We often talk about our "personal" relationship with Jesus Christ. When we accepted Jesus Christ as our personal Lord and Savior, we were incorporated into the Body—the WHOLE BODY—of Christ. It is personal, but it is not about us alone. We all know the words from John 3:16, but the following verse puts the exclamation point to the saving message. "For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that **the world** might be saved through Him." God's plan of salvation is for the whole world. Yes, God loves you, and He saved you. But you were not saved in isolation. You were incorporated into the Kingdom of God. You may want answers to personal problems, but don't be surprised when you lift those up in prayer and God starts talking to you about the needs of the poor and homeless, the sick and weary. Because it's not about you; it's about the Kingdom.

Saturday, March 24

God's Hands, Your Hands

"Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus; and when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael to be king over Syria; and Jehu...you shall anoint to be king over Israel; and Elisha...you shall anoint to be prophet in your place.
(1 Kings 19:15b-16)

Who made Hazael king over Syria? Who made Jehu king over Israel? Who raised up Elisha as prophet? It was God, of course. And how was it that God brought these things to pass. He did so through Elijah's hands. He said to the prophet, "You shall anoint..." The only hands that God has to do His work in the world belong to His people.

John Michael Talbot's song, *St. Theresa's Prayer*, clearly speaks to this truth.

Christ has no body now but yours
No hands, no feet on earth but yours
Yours are the eyes through which He looks with
 compassion on this world
Yours are the feet with which He walks to do good
Yours are the hands with which He blesses all the world
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes,
You are His body

(©1987, John Michael Talbot, from album Heart of a Shepherd)

God specifically told Elijah to anoint Hazael, Jehu, and Elisha. He said, "You shall..." in regards to each one. It was God's work uniquely appointed for Elijah. There is a common temptation among Christians to confuse doing God's work with allowing God to do His work through us. I may see something that needs to be done—a good work—but did God call me to do it? God has many hands. If I do something that God has called someone else to do, I inhibit them from doing the work of God, and I am probably leaving undone the work He has for me to do. What is God calling you to do? Are you allowing God to do His work through you?

Palm Sunday, March 25

God's Remnant

"I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Ba'al, and every mouth that has not kissed him." (1 Kings 19:18)

In troubled times we often become tempted to create answers to our turmoil that comfort us, regardless of their basis in reality. For example, in the late 19th century the United States was recovering from a horrendous civil war. People were frightened and looking for answers from God regarding future hope. D.L. Moody offered a possible solution: the rapture. He described God's concern for His faithful remnant as a lifeboat to snatch away true believers from the temporal turmoil and spare them tribulation. This was based on 1 Thess. 4:13-17 "...the dead in Christ will rise first; then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air..." .

Elijah lived in similarly troubled times. God tells the prophet that "I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Ba'al". This is the faithful remnant. Both Old and New Testaments describe the remnant as what is left of a community after it undergoes a catastrophe. The key here is that the faithful are not spared tribulation, rather they persevere in the Lord through the times of trial. Elijah and seven thousand faithful followers of our Lord were not spared tribulation, they triumphed over it!

There is far more to remnant theology than can be covered in a half-page meditation. It is a wide-ranging theme in the Old Testament, and a clarion call to New Testament believers for faithfulness. Paul quotes from 1 Kings 19 in his teaching on the remnant in Romans chapters 9-11 tying the Old to the New. The common theme, and what we as believers should pursue, is summarized in the Revelation. The remnant are "those who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus" (12:17). Are you standing fast in faith in your times of turmoil?

Monday, March 26

Obedience and Humility

So he departed from there, and found Elisha ... (1 Kings 19:19a)

As we described in yesterday's meditation, the faithful persevere through trials and tribulation. They remain obedient to God's calling and commandments. Often, as Elijah found out, that obedience includes a dose of humility. God told the prophet to return to Israel, to face the prospect of trouble, and even the possibility of death. But he was also told to anoint Elisha "to be prophet *in your place*". Nobody wants to hear that they are being replaced. But in obedience and humility, Elijah "departed from there, and found Elisha".

As we enter this Holy Week we are called to focus on our Lord's sacrifice. Innocent of all wrong, our Savior suffered for our sin. When suffering comes our way, whether warranted or not, how do we cope? Tennis pro, Arthur Ashe, contracted AIDS from a blood transfusion while receiving treatment for a heart attack. In a speech given at Niagara Community College he said, "I was reminded of something Jesus said on the cross: 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?'... Jesus asked the question, in effect, of why must the innocent suffer. And I'm not so innocent -- I mean, I'm hardly a perfect human being -- but you ask about yourself, 'Why me?' And I think, 'Why not me?'... If I were to say, 'God, why me?' about the bad things, then I should have said, 'God, why me?' about the good things that happened in my life."

Obedience is as much about attitude as it is about action. Elijah returned; he put the Lord's command into action. But his obedience was not complete until he, in humility, accepted that he would be replaced. True obedience requires humility. St. Benedict's Rule says obedience is always immediate, complete, and joyful. Can you be joyful and humble when the Lord tells you to do an unpleasant task? Can you say, "Why not me?"

Tuesday, March 27

Passing the Mantle

Elijah passed by [Elisha] and cast his mantle upon him. (1 Kings 19:19b)

Moses, Samuel, Isaiah, Jeremiah, even Jonah, among the Old Testament prophets (Ex. 3; 1 Sam 3; Jer. 1; Is. 6; Jonah 1), the twelve disciples of Jesus and Paul (Luke 6; Acts 9) in the New Testament, were all called directly by God. Unlike these men, Elisha is not called by God directly, but by Elijah. While God appoints Elisha by name, Elijah does the actual calling, and he does so by “passing the mantle”. Of the three commissions given to Elijah by God on Mount Horeb, this calling of Elisha would be the only one that Elijah would actually carry out himself. Elijah was commissioned to anoint Hazael and Jehu, but ultimately it was Elisha who carried out that commission. He succeeded Elijah and inherited his prophetic anointing and the responsibilities that came with it.

But passing the mantle of responsibility can be hard. For one thing, it means giving up control, or the illusion thereof. We all can become so invested in our work that we begin to think of that work as our own. But in our better moments we know that it’s God’s work that He has entrusted to us. The problem is, when we make an idol of our ministry it becomes hard to pass the mantle. Our pride gets in the way, and the devil tempts us to believe that no one else can do this ministry as well as we can!

But passing the mantle we must. Passing responsibility for the ministry to the next generation has been part of God’s plan from the beginning. It was commanded by God in the Law (Deut. 6:6-7), and practiced by all of God’s anointed servants. Moses trained Joshua, Paul taught Timothy and Titus. And in the Apostolic Succession we see the Church’s leadership passing the mantle from one generation to the next. In your ministry, is there someone God wants you to be teaching and preparing? Will you be willing to step aside, like Elijah, and pass the mantle at the appropriate time?

Wednesday, March 28

Behold I Do a New Thing

And [Elisha] left the oxen, and ran after Elijah, and said, “Let me kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow you.” And [Elijah] said to him, “Go back again; for what have I done to you?” And [Elisha] returned from following him, and took the yoke of oxen, and slew them... (1 Kings 19:20-21a)

It is troubling for me as a priest when a parishioner dies intestate—without a will. Sadly, a large percentage of Christians avoid preparing a will because they do not want to think about dying. And yet, dying is an integral part of what we are called to do as Christians. St. Paul says, “But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him” (Rom. 6:8). Our old way of living must die if we are to be made alive in Jesus. Again, Paul says, “...if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come” (2 Cor. 5:17).

Elisha had to die to his old way of life in order to embrace the calling that Elijah had placed upon him. When Elijah found Elisha the young prophet “was plowing, with twelve yoke of oxen” (vs. 19). However, when the mantle was laid upon him, he “took the yoke of oxen, and slew them”. The Lord was calling him to do a new thing and he permanently severed the ties to his old way of life. He allowed God to transform him into a new creation.

In this Holy Week we are invited to walk with Christ to Calvary, and there to die with Him that we may share in His resurrection. Isaiah prophesied, “Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?” (43:18-19). It is sometimes difficult to do this because it means breaking ties with friends and/or family who may not support our new way of life. Or we don’t want to give up a habit that we find enjoyable but is not conducive to our maturing faith in Christ. We see Elisha severing those ties. And, likewise in the Gospels, we see Peter, James, and John leave their nets and follow Jesus. What oxen or nets are you holding on to?

Maundy Thursday, March 29

Laid Down His Burdens

And [Elisha] returned from following [Elijah], and took the yoke of oxen, and slew them, and boiled their flesh with the yokes of the oxen, and gave it to the people, and they ate. (1 Kings 19:21a,b)

It was a dream—a nightmare. She was being swept down a swiftly flowing river while tightly gripping the handle of a large trunk. The weight of the trunk was pulling her under and she was in danger of drowning. The Lord said, “Look at the trunk.” She struggled harder against the flow, flailing against the current with her other hand. “Look at the trunk!” She took her eyes off the rapids and lifted her arm above the waterline. Clutched in her hand was the handle of a steamer trunk, but there was no trunk attached. The Lord said, “You can let that go. I have unburdened you.” God is recreating us. The old man has been washed away in the waters of baptism, but we need to let go of that old way of life and the burdens that belong to it. St. Paul says, “Put off your old nature which belongs to your former manner of life...” (Eph. 4:22).

Elisha “put off” his old life. He not only slew the oxen, he cooked the meat and “gave it to the people, and they ate.” He laid aside the steamer trunk of his old life, and celebrated his new with a feast. On the night before Jesus died, He “laid aside his garments, and girded himself with a towel” (John 13:4). He put off the garments of the incarnate life and gave us all a foretaste of the feast in the Kingdom.

On this night, as we come together at the Lord’s table for the Maundy Thursday Eucharist, let us lay down the things which burden us, the baggage we cannot carry on the Way. Let us join together around the Table of the Lord, put off the old life, grasp a glimpse of the Heavenly Banquet, and feast with our Lord.

Good Friday, March 30

Follow Him to Calvary

Then [Elisha] arose and went after Elijah... (1 Kings 19:21c)

About a half mile southeast of the city of Rome there is a small church named Chiesa del Domine Quo Vadis. It is built on the site where tradition says St. Peter, fleeing persecution, met the Lord. Peter asks Jesus, “*Quo vadis?*” (“Where are you going?”) Jesus replies, “I am going to Rome to be crucified again”. Peter then returns to the city, where he is ultimately crucified upside-down.

To follow Jesus is to follow Him all the way to Calvary. At the Last Supper (John 13) Peter asks Jesus, “Where are you going?” Jesus replies, “Where I am going you cannot follow me now.” Peter insists, “Why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.” But Peter’s resolve fails him in the Garden, and together with the other disciples flees into hiding. Following Jesus begins when we lay down our lives and allow Him to transform us into a new creation. As we die to self, His Spirit gives us new life.

Elisha knew what had happened to Elijah, how difficult it had been for him, and the threats to his life. Nevertheless, he followed Elijah, knowing the same fate might await him. He even asked for a double portion of his spirit (2 Kg. 2:9). A double portion is given to the first born son. Elisha wanted Elijah to give him the inheritance of the first born son. Elijah did not promise that inheritance, but tested the young prophet, and Elisha proved faithful in following.

The Lord tests His followers, as He tested the twelve. Of the twelve disciples, one betrayed Him, one denied Him, and all abandoned Him in His hour of need. But they all, except the betrayer, returned to Him, and all died a martyr’s death, except John, who died a prisoner in exile. It is never too late to turn back and follow the Lord. His Way leads to Calvary. Will you follow?

Holy Saturday, March 31 Ministered to Him

*Then [Elisha] arose and went after Elijah, and ministered to him.
(1 Kings 19:21c)*

It is one thing to follow Jesus, it is another to minister to Him. But how can I minister to the King of kings and Lord of lords? “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me” (Mt. 25:40).

Mother Teresa said, “I see Jesus in every human being. I say to myself, this is hungry Jesus, I must feed him. This is sick Jesus. This one has leprosy or gangrene; I must wash him and tend to him. I serve because I love Jesus. Each one of them is Jesus in disguise.” How do we show our love for Jesus? We minister to Him in all of His various disguises.

As we come to the end of this Lenten Season, and our journey through the wilderness, let us listen for our Lord’s still small voice; let us deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Him (Luke 9:23). And when we begin looking for Him and see Him in His many disguises, let us not turn away in fear, or horror, or shame, or pride, but let us minister to Him. So when the Lord says to us, “I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me” (Mt. 25:35-36), let us thank God that He allowed us to minister to Him in the least, the lost, and the lonely.

Elisha ministered to Elijah. The old prophet was weary, and it was time to receive. The young prophet administered the grace of God to him. As we enter the Easter Season, let us be alert for those who are weary, sick, alone, and estranged. And let us seek Christ in them, and administer the grace of God to them. And may God be glorified in our lives as we minister to Jesus in His many disguises.

Easter Sunday, April 1 Christ is Risen

He is risen, he is not here. (Mark 16:6)

**Alleluia! Christ is Risen.
The Lord is Risen Indeed. Alleluia!**

The Venerable William G. McLoughlin, Rector
Church of the Resurrection Charismatic Episcopal Church

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