

“Limping with Different Opinions”

Sermon by Lisa Crismore

June 2, 2013 – John Knox Presbyterian Church

1 King 18:20-39

I have enjoyed watching the Pacers this year in the play-offs. It has been exciting to see them do so well. Memories of the Reggie Miller era have come flooding back. The days of Mark Jackson, Rik Smits and Chris Mullen were the times when I wore my Pacer t-shirt proud. This shirt has long been retired to be worn only for painting. Do you recall the local sports announcer, Slick Lenard, yelling out, “Boom Baby”, when Reggie would make those magical 3-pointers?

But whether it is the 1990s or 2013, the players are in a contest to beat the other team. This is exactly where we are on Mt. Carmel with Elijah and the prophets of Baal. Even the mockery of Elijah toward the competition reminds me of the trash talk that players have on the basketball court!

The people of Israel have been tempted to follow the idol Baal. This deity was introduced by King Ahab’s wife Jezebel. Baal was a god of agriculture, who promised to bring rain to the fields and grant a bountiful harvest. There had been a drought that had lingered for 3 years. I’m sure the no watering and no fireworks ban was a permanent thing and the government aid was no longer there. These people were in despair and hopelessness. It is no wonder then why they were searching for either god or Baal to take away their pain. They wanted answers!

We are no different than the Israelites or the prophets of Baal. There are times in our lives that we are searching and seeking - for relief, for answers, for comfort, for power, for strength. We are wondering where God is in our hopelessness, despair and darkness. I think there are times where we don’t even have to be wandering in the wilderness but we simply lose sight and focus on God. We reach out to whatever feels good.

Barbara Brown Taylor spoke recently at a conference I attended. She was sharing insights of her new book, Walking in the Darkness. She wonders why people have been afraid of the dark. We are always searching for God in the light but isn’t God there in the darkness as well. Barbara lives out in the country where at night it gets very dark. She says that if you look up though you will see a wondrous array of brilliant stars. In the United States, Two-thirds of us cannot see many of the star constellations. There is too much artificial light and these marvelous stars are hidden from our view. God is right there in the darkness but we are so focused on the artificial light to get us through life that we fail to see it.

Elijah alerts us today to choose the God that we want to follow. He says we need to choose! What is our artificial light that we need to shut-off to truly see God? In a world where everything is so focused on self-gratification, it is so easy to justify the need to focus on financial security, family, self-worth, pleasure, comfort. It is true that we have to be responsible because many of us have families, who depend on us. There is that fine-line of balancing our focus on God, others and ourselves. What is it that has such a strong force that pushes and pulls on us so that we lose sight of God?

I was struck by the image of the people limping around in this passage as this word shows up twice. Once when Elijah wants them to decide who they will follow and once when the prophets are around the unanswered altar of Baal. When someone is limping, they are off balance and usually in pain.

I can recall the time when I sprained my ankle while working at FedEx. This sprain caused me to limp for several weeks! The sprain happened one night when I was working 3rd shift at the airport hub. I had volunteered to stay after to help clear the ramp of all empty freight containers and equipment. It was an EXTREMELY windy night. To clear the containers which are on dollies, they have to be hooked up to a little vehicle called a tug. I had lowered the lock on the dolly so that I could back-up the tug to latch it and pull the container away. As I am looking over my shoulder, I noticed the wind had begun to move the empty container like a sail boat gliding on the water. Unfortunately, it was sailing away from me and toward the only parked airplane on the ramp. I panicked! Instead of getting into the tug and driving in front of the container to stop it, I ran over and tried to put the lock up. When I got in front of it to lift the lock, my ankle twisted. I went down with the container and the dolly rolled over part of me. There was a person across the ramp that witnessed the whole thing and came to my rescue. I was very fortunate to only have a few scrapes and a banged up ankle.

Through my weeks of limping around, I realized that I had lost focus on the big picture which was safety. At FedEx there are many things bigger than you; one must make safety a priority and your main focus.

Aren't we like that with God? Elijah today is using this tremendous display of God's power to bring the people's focus back to God. God has to be the priority! It is difficult to do this in a world where all these things are pulling us in different directions.

We can't always be witnesses to the miracle. God can't always come down in a ball of fire and get our attention! We have to be mindful of the small silent voice and presence of God. Those stars in the pitch dark night! The guardian angels that are there to lend aid when we do stupid things!

Corrie Ten Boom, a holocaust survival, was put in a concentration camp with her family because they were caught helping Jews escape from the Nazis. The Ten Booms were strong Christians. In her book, The Hiding Place, Corrie shares the story of when her sister wanted to give thanks to God for the fleas in their infested, cramped barracks at Ravensbruck concentration camp. Her sister, Betsy, told her they must give thanks for all things are of God. Corrie could barely bring herself to give thanks for these miserable things that chewed her up at night. But looking back it was those horrible bugs that kept the guards from their living space and assaulting them. This also allowed the women to freely have a smuggled Bible open to share God's Word. Corrie wrote that many women found Christ in that very dark, dark place! (The Hiding Place by Corrie Ten Boom and Elizabeth and John Sherrill; 1971 & 1984; Chosen - a division of Baker Publishing Group)

Later in the service, we will see a DVD clip titled, "99 Balloons". It is a testament of how God speaks to us in the darkness and how we should celebrate God's goodness even in the midst of hopelessness. Praise be to our living Lord, who is indeed God! Amen.