

Pastor T.C. Arnold
5th Sunday after Trinity
1 Kings 19:11-21
June 26th, 2016

My predecessor was my hero. I'm talking about Elijah, of course. He stood up to the threat of persecution, the threat of great bodily harm, and the threat of death more times than one could count. He confronted the evil king Ahab. He stood up to his prophet-murdering wife, Jezebel, and he even defeated 850 prophets of two false gods on the top of Mount Carmel. That one was my favorite.

Good morning, my name is Elisha. I am the successor to Elijah, called by God to work within the office of prophet within the Kingdom of Israel. But before I go any further, I have to tell you the story that led up to the Old Testament text appointed for today. This is what really put Elijah over the edge.

Elijah presented a challenge to the prophets of Baal in Chapter 18. The prophets of the god Baal would build an altar, put a bull on it, and call on Baal to light the sacrifice. Elijah would do the same, asking the Lord to set his sacrifice on fire.

The Baal prophets went first. They chanted, danced, drew blood, and spent most of the day waiting and hoping. Nothing happened. Elijah wondered out loud if Baal might be vacationing. Then it was Elijah's turn. One man plus God, verses a team of 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of the goddess Asherah. Elijah had his altar and sacrificial bull drenched with water. There was going to be no mistake about this one. He prayed to the Lord. Sure enough, fire came, consuming the entire altar. Elijah had won a great victory. But his victory was short lived. Here's what nearly did him in.

Evil King Ahab told Jezebel what Elijah had done. Queen Jezebel burned with anger and predicted that Elijah would be dead in 24hrs. So, he ran for his life. He ran 90 miles and then he sat down under a tree. The Lord asked Elijah what he was doing. So, he offered this statement to the Lord: *"I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down you altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away."* You can imagine the fear, the frustration, and the exhaustion in his voice when he is offering this petition to the Lord.

Jesus knew this kind of weight of responsibility – even more. He once described Himself with these words: *"Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."* There were times when our Lord left the crowds to be alone with His Father or with a handful of close friends. The truth is that Jesus does not sound all that different from Elijah when it was from the cross He cries, *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"* Instead of under a tree, Jesus was "on" a tree.

The comparisons don't stop there. Elijah was persecuted and so was Jesus. Jezebel breathed out murderous threats, and so did the congregation of the Pharisees. Elijah destroyed the servants of Baal, and Jesus trampled upon Satan and his hosts. Elijah raised to life the son of the widow; and Jesus raised to life the son of the widow (as well as others). Elijah sustained the widow with bread; and Jesus satisfied thousands with a little bread. Elijah was taken up in a chariot to heaven; and our Redeemer ascended and took His seat on the right hand of His Father.

As one called by God to be a prophet, Elijah suffered greatly. The reason, he was doing and being what the Lord would have him do and be. And now God has responded to Elijah and He has called me, Elisha, to take the mantel of great responsibility and carry forth the Word of God to the nations. I'm a farmer. I live with my parents. I'm plowing in the fields when Elijah calls me. Now I'm the one who is called to this awesome, scary, threatening, dreadful occupation of prophet. Does it even make sense that I would accept it? Am I insane for doing so? To the world... probably. To awesome responsibly that comes through what God has called me to be... never.

In the Gospel text for today, men, who were farmers... they just farm the water instead of the dirt... are called by God to lay down their earthly vocation and follow Him. Just like me. I was called to lay down everything and follow the Lord. This is what it is like to be called to the office of Prophet and Apostle. God calls you too. But, fortunately... not like this.

What I mean is this... Yes, God has called you to the vocation of Christian. But this does not mean you forsake your earthly God-given vocations. So, whether that is the vocation of fisherman or farmer... of office worker or retail worker... of father or mother... God has placed you in those places... to be a Christian in the midst of those jobs... carrying forth a life lived for Jesus... that others may know Him from the place where you stand in the world. While God would call me, Elisha, away from my vocation as farmer, God calls you to be a Christian within the vocation He has given you – to share the Good News, to love your neighbor, to be a testament of the one true faith, to show others how Jesus is the way, the truth and the life...

But as God has called you within your place in this world, He has also called you away from the world's ways. In other words, you don't have to sell your twelve yoke of oxen because you are a farmer. But you do have to give up indecent living. You must stop giving the devil his due when you talk poorly about your neighbor and hurt his reputation. You must stop chasing after the kind of pleasure that is the master of your heart – and instead have your heart belong to those who have been given to you... your wife/husband, your children, and, first and foremost, your God. Stop acting like you don't belong in the Christian vocation by chasing after other gods. Elijah showed how they will not triumph over God, and God shows you how these false gods we build for our own lives are not to be put before Him. Stop being a prophet of a false god. Repent! Live the way God has given you to live.

And that is what we need... to see what God has given for life. It's true that our Christian vocations are filled with despair and heartache in a world filled with those who love anything but the Lord... and who reject those who love Him. But God has turned rejection into victory. In order for your victory to be won, Jesus had to be rejected by this world. Our punishment is laid on His shoulders as this rejection took our Lord to the tree of destruction which became the tree of life.

Think of it, our sins which all stem from our worship of our own made-up – or – the world's false gods have been taken by the Lord Jesus. Our perfect Lord became a retded sin-bearer so that He could pour out His blood of righteousness and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. This is an undeserved love, my friends. You did nothing to receive God's honor in this way. But He loves His creation. He loves you. And through all that Elijah went through, through those words of despair and anger – *"I'm the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too..."* God's love never failed – it never faltered. The same for me when God handed this job of prophet – even in my times of despair. The same for you, beloved in the Lord.

If you have despair, then you must be a called Christian. If you experience heartache, hurt feelings, devastation, you must be a called Christian... you must be a Christian father or mother, or wife or husband. You must be an office worker or farmer or a parent. You must be you... because Christians have it. God calls not the perfect, not the most graceful, not the gifted... and whatever we think those things mean. God calls sinners. How? Through death... the cross... which we see clearly in our own sufferings, that is the lens to see THE cross of Jesus more clearly. So, if you are suffering... let me tell you... I can relate. But fret not, beloved, you are not alone. We are in this together. And better yet, we are with our Lord – He is with us – and this promise remains, "Never will I leave you, never will I forsake." I needed that each day. And, I'm sure, you do too. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.