

1 Kings 19:

You may have heard sermons on this passage in the past that focused on Elijah hearing God not in the wind or the earthquake or fire, but in a still small voice, but that is missing the focus of this story.

To remind you of Elijah's call, he was constantly battling against the forces that would turn the people away from God. He made sure they got through difficult times. As with any prophet, life wasn't always easy and life could be tough. And when life got tough for him, God was there to take care of him. God always made sure he had what he needed throughout the the hard times that he went through. After once again trying to keep the people faithful while facing off with a queen who was born and raised in another country; who worshipped an idol called Baal. He found he was done.

Right before this passage, Elijah was calling out King Ahab and his wife, Queen Jezebel. Jezebel was not an Israelite - and she worshipped Baal. And, she wanted the Israelites to do so also.

After challenging Jezebel to a competition of sorts, a one of "lets see whose God is more powerful", Jezebel finds herself of course humiliated and her useless prophets killed. She has only one thought on her mind know and that is to have Elijah killed.

What we find in this passage is a prophet who has worked hard all his life working to keep the people faithful and free from the corruption of "alternate facts." He's had many successes in his work, of course. He had truly been a great prophet, but working for God can be challenging. There is always one more challenge, one more problem, one more task to take on.

The work, his life, had been hard and now Jezebel was out to have him killed and he was afraid and, in our contemporary terms, we would probably say that he was burned out. He didn't have anything left within him to give, and so he left to go far away and find a place to die. That might sound extreme, especially for such a man of God! God had been there for him all along, providing food when he needed it, a place to stay when needed. Over and over again, we see how God had provided, but Elijah was no longer to remember those events.

Now he could only remember the most recent events that had brought him to this place of desiring death. He was burned out. We might even deduce that he had sunk into a depression. That wouldn't be out of the realm of what he was facing. He just wanted everything to be over.

While he may have wanted to give up to the point of death, that was not in God's plan. And I think this is the point of the story. We are called to give our life in service to God, to respond to the tasks that our given us, no matter how hard. And that is often hard for us to do.

To do so may require going outside of one's comfort zone. Because responding to God's call forever requires us to respond to the human suffering around us, to challenge the corrupt leadership that causes so much suffering, to work to change inhumane structures, to bring hope and light and life to those who have none.

But that doesn't mean that we don't get tired, weary, burned out. It doesn't mean that we can face the suffering of others and not be affected. It doesn't mean that we can stand up to ICE agents and

soldiers in our streets and not feel afraid. It doesn't mean that we can keep going and not get to the point of feeling burned out, of being scared and that life is not worth living anymore. But when we get to that point, that is when we need to let God nourish us.

And that is the beauty of this story. When he had given up an angel came to him and told him to get up and eat. And there was a cake and a jar of water for him. And he ate and drank and then went back to sleep. And then a second time an angel came and told him to eat and he did so. And for forty days and forty nights God fed Elijah and gave him time to sleep, get rested, get nourished and strengthened and at the end of those forty days God expected Elijah to return to work. We are told the Word of the Lord came to him and asked why he was still there?

But even with the food and the sleep, it was hard to get Elijah to go back. He reminds the Lord of all the difficulty he had faced. He's having trouble moving beyond his pain, his weariness, his worries, his sense of despair. I don't know about you, but I've been in that place. Unable to get out of my focus off that one terrible, and it was terrible, situation I had been thrust in - and it was hard to move on.

And then God comes to him and speaks to him in a still small voice, a whisper to the heart: Why are you here?

Such a loaded question. Elijah is probably thinking, I've already told you why I'm here God.

But perhaps what God is asking is: Why are you here? You are here because I have been with you every minute of your life, guiding you,

caring for you as I just did on this mountain. Loving you and loving my people through you. Remember? I cared for you when there was a drought when I sent ravens with food and water. I was with you when I sent the widow and her son to feed you. I was with you when I sent other prophets to be with you and to speak my Word to the people and to my enemies. And I was with you when you faced down the prophets of Baal. I was with you and I provided.

What this story is asking us is to look around and see God at work in our lives. I have already said this several times since I've been here and I guess it is kind of my mantra. It is important to remember what God has done for you in your life. Remembering helps us through those hard times.

When I was working with one Deacons Board, I asked them to pair up and share an experience of when they knew without a shadow of doubt when God was with them in a trying time. Listening in on their discussions I heard of one woman whose son was getting into drugs and how they almost lost him to addiction. It was a time of grief and unimaginable stress, but God was with them throughout. Slowly their son was able to overcome his addiction.

Not all the stories were of that magnitude. Some were of God being there when the person went through a divorce or giving them the strength to care for loved one on hospice. Dramatic stories and quiet stories, God was there helping each of them through the dark night of their soul and into the light once again. God was there.

Remember God's goodness to you, because there is a lot of work for us to do.

So what are you feeling this morning? Energized to take on the good fight? Are you feeling strengthened by the nourishment that has been provided or the sleep that was given? Are you ready to stand up to evil? Because that is the moment that we are all being called to.

We are in unprecedented times. An outrageous, unprovoked attack on another country that now puts so many soldiers and civilians at potential risk in a retaliatory strike. Every day there seems to be a new outrage. A new attack on the freedoms and liberties of law abiding citizens and innocent undocumented people who are just trying to live a better life with their families. The boldness in which some people express their hate and disregard for others is shocking, yet is becoming numbingly too common. A president who disregards the rule law, who disregards the Constitution. What we should be outraged, all this craziness and lawlessness, is somehow becoming normalized because it is a constant now in our lives and, I would hazard to guess, too much to even know where to begin to fight against what is happening. We don't know how long this dark night that our country is in will last for.

But I do know that there is work for us to do. To be the light. To bring the hope. To speak truth to power. To be the ally. To stand up for what is right. To put our lives on the line for one another.

I saw a video a young military man made speaking out against what the government was expecting them to do. I'm not sure if he was one of the soldiers sent to Los Angeles. If you haven't seen the video, the serviceman was articulate and clear in what he was saying. I have since heard that he is on a three day psych hold - for depression? Or perhaps because it is easier for the government to dismiss what he

said by implying he's crazy? I'm not sure. But I can't imagine the stress he put upon himself by making that video. And I can't imagine the courage it took to make it. He should be proud of himself.

What does the Lord require of us? To do justice, to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God. It is a burn out task that God requires of us, but we need to remember that when we need that break, when we are feeling burned out, that God is there to nourish us and God is fine with us taking the time to rest and relax. We all need that and we all need to give ourselves the grace to take that time to kind of internally regroup. But we can't remain in our cave.

After God has nourished us, then we need to respond to God's call to "Go!" Go out into the world and make a difference. I am always there with you, to provide what you need to meet the task at hand. So go and Make a Joyful Noise to counter the hateful noise that seems to be getting louder and louder. Go and make Good trouble, as John Lewis told us. But the point being Go! Go and do what God has called you to do to bring heaven to earth. To be a light in this darkness. Go and stand up to injustice and do so with a strong voice and with the surety that you do so with the power of the Holy Spirit within you. Take rest and nourishment when needed, but always remember that afterwards we need to once again get up and GO! The work, unfortunately, now grows by the day.

Elijah fulfilled his call. Let us now also. What are you still doing here? Go!

