

Text: 1 Kings 19:9–18

⁹ There he went into a cave and spent the night. And the word of the LORD came to him: “What are you doing here, Elijah?” ¹⁰ He replied, “I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.” ¹¹ The LORD said, “Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by.” Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. ¹² After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. ¹³ When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave. Then a voice said to him, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” ¹⁴ He replied, “I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.” ¹⁵ The LORD said to him, “Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus. When you get there, anoint Hazael king over Aram. ¹⁶ Also, anoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet. ¹⁷ Jehu will put to death any who escape the sword of Hazael, and Elisha will put to death any who escape the sword of Jehu. ¹⁸ Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and all whose mouths have not kissed him.” – NIV84

Prayer of the Day:

Almighty and most merciful God, preserve us from all harm and danger that we, being ready in both body and soul, may cheerfully accomplish what you want done; through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Verse of the Day:

Alleluia. Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. Alleluia. (Hebrews 11:1)

Sermon Text:

“I think the prophet Elijah was a bigger deal than we know.” As I talked with various pastors over the course of our synod convention last week, one of them made that comment. Think about it. At the Ascension, Elijah and Moses appear talking with Jesus. During the Crucifixion as Jesus cries out, “*My God my God, Why have You forsaken me?*” those gathered around thought he might be calling to ... Elijah. When Jesus asked the apostles “who people said He was”, the answer came back “Some say, Elijah ...”. It got me thinking and then as I sat down with the lessons for this week who should be present in the first lesson but the Prophet Elijah. And as we come to the big deal, what is he doing? Pouting, utterly upset, and this even after one the more impressive miracles the Lord allowed him to perform as he dispatched the false prophets of baal immediately before this.

So what had happened? What terrible atrocity had occurred which sent Elijah into hiding in the cave at Mt. Horeb? Ahab and Jezebel had not repented after the defeat of their prophets. In fact, Jezebel had called for the death of Elijah. So he ran. He ran and pouted because things didn't go the way he wanted them to. You can hear it in the words he repeatedly speaks to God, “*I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.*”

Have you been here pouting with the prophet? I know I have. Oh, to be sure I do doubt that you or even I for that matter have ever had to worry about wicked kings and queens calling for our lives but what is Elijah really upset about? God's will and his own have not lined up. Our prophet believes that because he has been zealous for the Lord, even more zealous than most, life should be far easier than it is. The Israelites should be listening to him, the worship of the one true God should be flourishing, prophets should be praised and not persecuted and Elijah should not be running for his life but living in the lap of luxury or at least at ease and at peace in the country called "God's own".

It's that false theology of glory once again that would reduce God to a genie in a lamp at our beck and call, or a board game that can be won if one just makes all the right moves. And that, dear friends, sounds far too familiar. Have you ever uttered the words, "It shouldn't be this hard?" Ever quietly wondered why the wicked seem to prosper while you slave away and can barely make ends meet? Ever looked over the casket and wondered why, why now, why my loved one, why me? Ever been upset with God enough to run away from His temple, His people, His Church and pout not in a cave but in the quiet of your home, in the busyness or the pleasure of the world around you, in the numbing destruction of sin, a bottle, a computer screen, even a pill?

Why? I know the answer and it's not just on display in Elijah the prophet, or Peter the apostle, it's in my own heart and soul as well. No doubt you find it in your own. I want God to do it my way and so doubt climbs in behind me even as I lash out at God. I wanted ease and comfort. I wanted wealth and praise. I wanted whatever it may have been and He didn't do it. He should have flexed His muscles for me and because He didn't, well now there is doubt, now there is the pout, now I'm angry.

Isn't it interesting how God then responds to our big deal of a prophet? ¹¹ *The LORD said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by." Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake.* ¹² *After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper.*

It's almost as if God puts the power Elijah wanted on display as He shatters rocks and tears apart the mountains. You can almost hear a question in the power that marches by the mouth of the cave, "Is this what you wanted Elijah?" But then the phrase, *but the LORD was not in these things*. That's what I want! That's what Elijah wanted! Go get my enemies Lord stick it to em! Prove to the world that I'm right and everyone else is wrong! Show Your power, show Your might, show Your glory! Except it really is my power, my might, my glory.

Instead, and Elijah immediately recognizes it, there comes a gentle whisper. What was the passage, ah yes, *"faith comes from hearing the message and the message is heard through the Word of Christ. (Romans 10:17)" "So is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. (Isaiah 55:11)" "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith. (Romans 1:16-17)"*

It's not impressive from a worldly point of view. It often lacks so much of what the world views as power. Yes, as Paul even says the world often calls it foolishness and weakness. But it is not. The Word provides everything we need, I would dare say even everything we crave, though it often requires patience to see it in full. Paul told the Corinthians, *When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God.* ² *For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.* ³ *I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling.* ⁴ *My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power,* ⁵ *so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power. (1 Corinthians 2:1-5)*

Yes, the Spirit works through that whisper, that Word of God. There He gives and grows His gift of faith which connects us to Christ and all He has done for us. In His cross, there is victory in forgiveness. In His life, we find success in His righteousness. In His resurrection, the promise of the glory we have so often hoped to see right now, but which waits perfectly for us in heaven.

Oh, and even then the promise. The promise that God has it all worked out, for our eternal good. What did God say to His prophet? ¹⁵ *The LORD said to him, "Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus. When you get there, anoint Hazael king over Aram.* ¹⁶ *Also, anoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet.* ¹⁷ *Jehu will put to death any who escape the sword of Hazael, and Elisha will put to death any who escape the sword of Jehu.* ¹⁸ *Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and all whose mouths have not kissed him."*

Oh, it may not always look the way we want it to (That's probably for the best by the way. I don't know about you but when I get too wrapped up in myself nothing ever really seems to go that well), but our God assures us that it's under His control. And even though we may not understand it, He has our best interests in mind as He guides us ever closer to the glory He has in store for us all. How did that second lesson go? ³¹ *What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us?* ³² *He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all — how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?* ³³ *Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies.* ³⁴ *Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.* ³⁵ *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?* ³⁶ *As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."* ³⁷ *No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.* ³⁸ *For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Do you struggle with doubt? So did just about every individual we see in the pages of Scripture. Do you struggle most when things don't go the way you planned? Join in with Peter and Elijah. Do you want God to do things your way and not His own? That's a tough one too. But God provides the answer to it all. As we run to His Word, the Spirit works within it. Connected to earthly elements in the Sacraments, God strengthens us, even as He washes all our sin away. In the promises of His Gospel, we find hope even when we cower in our caves of doubt as He calls us to **THE WONDER OF GOD'S WHISPER** and the victory it secures! Amen!