

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Seventh Sunday after Trinity, July 14, 2013

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 518, 516:3-4, 514, 483, 532.

Lessons: 1 Kings 18:16b-40, Romans 10:16-11:5, Matthew 11:1-15.

Sermon Text: 1 Kings 19:3-19.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

In our Old Testament lesson you heard how Elijah, with the Lord's help, shamed and then killed all the prophets of the false god Baal. Our text follows upon that history.

Elijah was afraid. Wicked king Ahab and his wicked wife Jezebel wanted to kill Elijah: *"Now Ahab told Jezebel everything Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. So Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah to say, 'May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them.'* (1 Kings 19:1-2) Jezebel had been killing the prophets of the Lord God. In spite of Elijah's great triumph in the test on Mount Carmel and the dramatic demonstration that Elijah's God is the Lord of heaven and earth and the source of Israel's blessings, Jezebel is not discouraged. Hers is no empty threat, and her husband, King Ahab has shown that he is either unwilling or unable to restrain her. So Elijah knows that his life is in danger.

The Lord allowed his servant Elijah to pass through this conflict, not so that he might exalt himself, but that he might rest content with the grace of his God, whose strength is mighty in the weak, and who would refine and strengthen him for his calling.

Elijah was understandably afraid for his life. But

GOD PROTECTS AND STRENGTHENS ELIJAH

- 1. Elijah is discouraged and ready to die.**
- 2. But the Lord God strengthens him.**
- 3. At Horeb (Mount Sinai) God teaches Elijah an important lesson, and**
- 4. God commands and encourages Elijah to return to his calling.**

Elijah was apparently so depressed that he wanted his life to end. He *"went a day's journey into the desert. He came to a broom tree, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. 'I have had enough, LORD,' he said. 'Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors.' Then he lay down under the tree and fell asleep."*

That is terrible. Here is a man who had just come from the most important and exciting triumph of his life and now because the Lord's enemies wanted to kill him he wanted the Lord to end his life. Elijah had concluded that his work was fruitless and consequently that life was not worth living. He had lost his confidence in the triumph of the kingdom of God.

But it was not to be.

Hasn't each of us been discouraged in our lives, especially in our lives as Christ's ambassadors? The discouragement could be over the wickedness of the world, or the inroads and attacks that Satan himself has made into our Christian community – the church – and the behavior of fellow confessors of Christ, fellow Church members.

But the Lord strengthened Elijah. *"All at once an angel touched him and said, 'Get up and eat.' He looked around, and there by his head was a cake of bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate*

and drank and then lay down again. The angel of the LORD came back a second time and touched him and said, 'Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you.'"

The angel of the Lord tells him that he can't do it by himself. So it is with every Christian. We cannot endure by ourselves. We must daily approach the Lord in prayer and ask for help for our daily journey.

"Strengthened by that food, he traveled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God." He went to the mountain of God. The name Horeb is used interchangeably with Mount Sinai. This is the only time other than the time of Moses when the mountain was visited in the Old Testament.

Elijah went to the place where God revealed a great deal of his Word and had it written down for his people. This is the place where God appeared to Moses in the burning bush. This is where Moses struck the rock at God's command and all the children of Israel in the wilderness and their flocks had water to drink. And, its most memorable history: This is the mountain where God gave his Law, his covenant to the children of Abraham, his chosen people from whom the Savior of all mankind would come.

He traveled about 200 miles to Mount Horeb. He was sustained by the Lord as Moses had been for the same length of time on the same mountain and as Jesus would be sustained in the desert shortly after his baptism.

God in his mercy provided sustenance and rest for his discouraged servant. Evidently Elijah had already determined to go to Mount Horeb, where God had established his covenant with his people.

"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?'" God knew, but asked anyhow. The question implies that Elijah had come to the mountain for his own misguided reasons and not because the Lord had sent him. It is not a direct reproof from the Lord but it summoned Elijah to examine the despairing thoughts he was thinking.

Now we see the real reason he was fleeing: He felt very much alone. *"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.'"*

Elijah did not give a direct answer to the Lord's question but implied that the work the Lord had begun centuries earlier with the establishment of the Sinai covenant had now come to nothing. Whereas Moses had interceded for Israel when they sinned with the golden calf, Elijah condemned the Israelites for breaking the covenant, and bitterly complained over the fruitlessness of his own work. Elijah thought he was the only prophet left.

The Lord wanted to show Elijah that the law alone, comparable to a destructive storm, earthquake and fire, will never convert man and bring him back to God. The sweet message of the Gospel is the only means of melting the hearts of sinners, even hardened sinners, such as the Israelites had become. The divine judgments of the law – the storm, the earthquake, the fire – could only prepare for God's coming grace, and the fulfillment of the gospel – the gentle whisper. This was a lesson for Elijah. He must return to continue God's mission to his people.

It seems that Elijah was looking for something, some sign, or some Word from God.

"The LORD said, 'Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by.'" He was to stand in the presence of the Lord! This is something many have desired, but few experienced. Moses and Elijah are those who had this great privilege. The Lord was to give him a great revelation. *"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. After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire."* God doesn't always make his presence known in a dramatic, powerful fashion. "

"And after the fire came a gentle whisper. 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?' 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.'"

God was in the gentle whisper – the *"still small voice"*. That's how he revealed himself to Elijah now.

And how does God reveal himself to us? He uses his Word. The Word that created all things. The Word that saves us. Oh, yes, we could say that God reveals himself in wind, earthquakes, fire – all the natural things, including volcanoes and tornadoes and hurricanes and naturally caused wildfires. But the complete knowledge of God appears in his Word.

Here is the difference between natural knowledge of God and knowledge of God from his Word. From the things God created, we can know he is powerful and divine. But we can never know from nature, from the things he created, from his power like windstorms, earthquakes, and fire what God has done to save us.

We must have God's written Word to reveal him to us. That Word was not completely written down until after Jesus, the Savior, appeared to the world. But before that time God sent his prophets, and caused the entire Old Testament to be written. And God chose humans, weak humans such as Moses, Elijah, and the man we call Saint Paul. As we read from the inspired New Testament writing of Saint Paul, he emphasizes that God chose the weak things of the world to reveal his Word to mankind. He uses His Word, spoken by weak, insignificant humans.

After Elijah hears the gentle whisper, the still small, voice, God repeats the question. Elijah gives the same answer, adding that he feels he is the only prophet of the Lord left. ***"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.'"***

God gives Elijah a special command: Go back and do your work. ***"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. Also, anoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet. 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.'"***

The Lord also has a special word of encouragement for Elijah. Despite what Elijah felt, believed, or thought, there were others who still served the true God. God said ***"Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel--all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and all whose mouths have not kissed him."***

We understand this to be a round number of seven thousand believers who are still faithful to Jehovah. Elijah had been mistaken in his conclusion that he alone remained faithful. This message to Elijah was a great consolation for the discouraged servant of God.

We are reminded in 2 Timothy 2:19: ***"God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: 'The Lord knows those who are his,'"*** The true Church of God is invisible, and even Satan cannot destroy it, as we are assured in Matthew 16:18 ***"I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."***

So Elijah is not alone. What do we learn from all this? We are not alone. We do not know all who believe in the true God.

Many may think they know the true God and think that they worship him in truth and purity, but it is our calling to be ambassadors for Christ, teaching the truths of God's Word.

Our feelings and opinions aren't what really matters. God matters. God's Word matters. God's truth matters. Running from God really doesn't work – except to our eternal damnation.

So through the Word of God spoken directly to him, Elijah learned to trust in God for salvation – the God who sent his only-begotten Son to save all mankind from their sins.

The Lord gave instructions to Elijah that revealed his sovereign power over people and nations. Even though Israel would experience divine judgment through Hazael, Jehu and Elisha, God would continue to preserve a remnant faithful to himself among the people.

"So Elijah went from there and found Elisha son of Shaphat. He was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen, and he himself was driving the twelfth pair. Elijah went up to him and threw his cloak around him."

Although Elijah was not to live long in the world, God provided for him, and continued to provide for believers. So too, the Lord provides for us, and we pray that he continue to provide the whole truth of his Word to us and our children and grandchildren. May we find encouragement in the troubles of Elijah! Amen.