

Sermon for August 13, 2023 – The 11th Sunday after Pentecost

1 Kings 19:9-18 EHV

Theme: Feel like giving up?

- 1) Pour your heart out to God in prayer.
- 2) Listen to his gentle voice in the gospel.
- 3) Understand that you are not alone.
- 4) Rejoice in His victory!

⁹He came to a cave and spent the night there. Then the word of the Lord suddenly came to him, saying, “Why are you here, Elijah?” ¹⁰He said, “I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of Armies, but the people of Israel have abandoned your covenant. They have torn down your altars and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking to take my life.” ¹¹Then the Lord said, “Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is passing by.” Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains and shattered rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind came an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. ¹²After the earthquake there was a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. After the fire there was a soft, whispering voice. ¹³When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak, and he went out and stood at the entrance to the cave. Then a voice came to him and said, “Why are you here, Elijah?” ¹⁴He said, “I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of Armies, but the people of Israel have abandoned your covenant. They have torn down your altars and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking to take my life.” ¹⁵Then the Lord said to him, “Go back the way you came and go to the Wilderness of Damascus. When you get there, you are to anoint Hazael as king over Aram. ¹⁶You will also anoint Jehu son of Nimshi as king over Israel and Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah as prophet in your place. ¹⁷Whoever escapes the sword of Hazael, Jehu will kill, and whoever escapes the sword of Jehu, Elisha will kill. ¹⁸But I have preserved in Israel seven thousand whose knees have not bent to Baal and whose lips have not kissed him.”

Do you ever feel like giving up? I mean, no one seems to listen to you when you share the Gospel with them. Many people have said: “I’ll come with you to Church someday,” but they never have. On top of that, some of your friends make fun of you behind your back because of your faith. Family members may have threatened not to have anything to do with you if you keep talking about Christ.

Why does your witness seem to fall on deaf ears? Is it worth even trying anymore when the world seems anything but receptive to the Gospel? Let us listen to how God graciously answered Elijah when he felt despair over Israel’s rejection of the LORD, under the theme: **Feel like giving up?**
1) Pour your heart out to God in prayer. 2) Listen to His gentle voice in the Gospel. 3) Understand that you are not alone. 4) Rejoice in His victory!

Part One: Pour your heart out to God in Prayer.

Our text finds Elijah in despair. Why? Because the Israelites had forsaken the LORD to follow the fertility gods of Baal and Asherah that were promoted by evil King Ahab and his wicked wife, Jezebel. She ordered the slaughter of the LORD's faithful prophets, but the people didn't care. Why not? Because they enjoyed the new hedonistic worship that allowed them to explore their sexual fantasies with whomever or whatever they wanted. They even went so far as to sacrifice their children to these new gods.

I can't help but think about how Israel's situation parallels something we might face in the future. True, so far, no one is targeting faithful preachers of the Gospel for destruction. Still, we have a government that actively promotes sexual deviancy and defends the killing of the unborn. We also have a populace that is more interested in satisfying their physical cravings than being concerned about their immortal soul. Yes, the same demonic forces that enticed Israel away from the LORD are working hard to do the same in our country today.

But that wasn't the only thing disturbing Elijah. A few weeks earlier, the LORD allowed him to have a showdown with the prophets of Baal and Asherah – proving that the LORD is God beyond any doubt. During that showdown, the LORD sent fire from heaven in a miraculous display of power to burn up an otherwise unignitable altar. Also, at Elijah's prayer, the LORD sent rain from heaven – ending a 3-year drought. The crowd observing that event chanted: *"The LORD, he is God! The LORD, he is God!"*ⁱ Elijah must have been all pumped up - thinking, "The people will certainly follow the LORD now." But then Jezebel gave the order: Consider Elijah public enemy #1; anyone who sees him should kill him. On hearing that, Elijah ran for his life, imagining that everything he did for the LORD was in vain. He was an emotional wreck – full of despair and wanting to die.

The Bible says: *"Elijah was a man just like us."*ⁱⁱ I know that can be hard to believe when you consider the miraculous things God worked through him, but it's true. And, like us, he was prone to fall into depression when things did not turn out how he expected.

For this reason, after Elijah came to a cave on Mount Horeb in Sinai, *the word of the Lord suddenly came to him, saying, "Why are you here, Elijah?"* With that question, the LORD graciously invited Elijah to bring out everything that was on his mind and disturbing his soul. What the LORD desired of Elijah, he also desires of us. He doesn't want us to keep our temptations, fears, doubts, and sins bottled up inside of us to deal with ourselves. No, he encourages us to let it all out in prayer - confessing everything we think and feel, regardless of how shameful it may seem.

Elijah accepted the LORD's invitation.¹⁰ *He said, "I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of Armies, but the people of Israel have abandoned your covenant. They have torn down your altars and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking to take my life."*

Even though what Elijah said was mostly true, he was also somewhat mistaken. Yes, the situation in Israel was horrible, but not to the point that he was the only believer left. Didn't he remember meeting Obadiah - a believer in the king's palace who secretly hid 100 prophets from Jezebel?ⁱⁱⁱ Didn't he remember the crowd's confession after his showdown with the prophets of Baal? Feelings of despair kept him from remembering those things – just like feelings of sadness often

keep us from recognizing God's blessings in our lives. Worse yet, they tempted him to lose faith in the LORD and the work He commissioned Elijah to do. Therefore, the LORD took a little time to remind Elijah who he was.

Part Two: Listen to his gentle voice in the gospel.

¹¹Then the Lord said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is passing by." Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains and shattered rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind came an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. ¹²After the earthquake there was a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. After the fire there was a soft, whispering voice. ¹³When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak, and he went out and stood at the entrance to the cave.

When people think about God, they often imagine his terrifying wrath and power. And isn't that what the people of Israel needed: something to scare them straight? Isn't that what our nation also needs: disasters like frightful windstorms ripping through Ottawa or raging fires throughout Canada to wake people up? But just as the LORD sent Elijah the wind, earthquake, and fire but was not in them, so also no one can come to know the true God merely through his mighty acts of judgment.

So where do we come to know the LORD? Only through the gentle voice of Jesus, who calls out: ²⁸"Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, because I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." ^{iv}

Yes, the LORD is wherever Jesus is, and Jesus promises to be found in his Gospel. Just as Jesus' gentle voice invited Elijah to find rest in him, he invites us to do the same. How can we not respond like Elijah and come before the LORD in humility and faith – ready to worship Him and listen to His Word?

Then a voice came to him and said, "Why are you here, Elijah?" ¹⁴He said, "I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of Armies, but the people of Israel have abandoned your covenant. They have torn down your altars and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking to take my life."

Again, the LORD invites Elijah to let it all out – all the temptation and fear leading him to despair. Elijah repeats what he said before, sadly still blinded by his feelings of self-pity to see the truth that he was not alone, that the spread of Christ's kingdom was not just up to him.

Part Three: Understand that you are not alone.

¹⁵Then the Lord said to him, "Go back the way you came and go to the Wilderness of Damascus. When you get there, you are to anoint Hazael as king over Aram. ¹⁶You will also anoint Jehu son of Nimshi as king over Israel and Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah as prophet in your

place. ¹⁷Whoever escapes the sword of Hazael, Jehu will kill, and whoever escapes the sword of Jehu, Elisha will kill. ¹⁸But I have preserved in Israel seven thousand whose knees have not bent to Baal and whose lips have not kissed him.”

The LORD knew the situation better than Elijah could. Elijah was just a part of God’s plan to call Israel to repentance, not the whole shebang. No, God would work through others – including unbelievers like Hazael and Jehu – to severely chastise his wayward people into repentance. But their very names must have comforted Elijah – reminding him of the LORD’s gracious sovereignty. Hazael means “One who sees God.” Jehu means “Jehovah is He.” Nimshi means “Rescued.” Elisha means “God of Salvation.” Shaphat means “Judge.” I can imagine the meaning of the beautiful names reminding Elijah of God’s mercy and promise of salvation. The LORD was in control, and he was not alone in his work – just as we are not alone in our work.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, I understand how helpless and alone we can feel: we are a tiny congregation that belongs to a small church body in a vast world. By earthly standards, our success rate is not good, and, to make matters worse, many Christian denominations are falling away from the truth. Are we the only ones left? No. Thank God for the invisible Church! He has reserved believers from every people, tribe, and nation. Even though false doctrine permeates Ottawa’s religious scene, the LORD works wherever his Word is taught – using it to call and keep his chosen people in the faith despite the false doctrine proclaimed by false teachers.

And, just as the LORD miraculously preserved an unseen number of believers in apostate Israel, the LORD preserves an unrecognized number of believers in our city today. We are not alone in our work. We are not alone in our faith. The devil may rage, but the victory belongs to the LORD!

Part Four: Rejoice in His victory!

But why does the LORD allow his church to suffer what seems like defeat in the world? Because the LORD *is patient ... not wanting anyone to perish, but all to come to repentance*. However, the LORD’s patience does have an end. As Israel’s history illustrates, when God’s calls to repentance continually go rejected and ignored, he will send his wind, earthquake, and fire – his mighty wrath over impenitence. Regarding the LORD’s final judgement, the apostle Peter writes: *On that day the heavens will pass away with a roar, the elements will be dissolved as they burn with great heat, and the earth and what was done on it will be burned up... ¹³But according to his promise we look forward to new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.* ^v

Even though we may not physically perceive it, the LORD is already victorious. He defeated Satan through Christ’s cross and empty tomb. Regardless of how things seem in our society, Jesus’s Kingdom continues to advance. Already now, there is a countless multitude from every tribe, people, language, and nation standing before the Lamb of God in heaven, with many more added to that number every day!^{vi} Keep that victory in sight as you confess Christ to the world. Though you may feel alone, you are not alone. Though you may feel your labour for the LORD is in vain, he ensures it never is.^{vii}

Therefore, brothers and sisters in Christ, learn from the lesson of Elijah: whenever the devil drives you to despair over your witness of Christ – tempting you **to feel like giving up?** Pour your heart out to God in prayer, listen to his gentle voice in the gospel, understand that you are not alone, and rejoice in Christ's victory! Amen.

ⁱ 1 Kings 18:39 EHV

ⁱⁱ James 5:17 EHV

ⁱⁱⁱ Cf. 1 Kings 18:3-4,7ff

^{iv} Matthew 11:28-30 EHV

^v 2 Peter 3:10, 13EHV

^{vi} Cf. Revelation 7:9-17

^{vii} Cf. 1 Corinthians 15:57-58