

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
305 EAST MAIN STREET
DURHAM, NC 27701
PHONE: (919) 682-5511



“Get Up, Eat, Walk”

A sermon by Sam R. Miglarese

12th Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year C)

June 23, 2013

1 Kings 19:1–8; Psalm 43; Galatians 3:23–29; Luke 9:18–24

*Lord God, open our ears and touch our hearts that we might hear
Your Word and respond to it with obedience. Amen.*

Several weeks ago, in my preaching on Trinity Sunday, I tried to convey a truth about capturing a glimpse into the mystery of God as a communion of persons through our relationships of love. In and through our relationships of love, in and through our love for one another in all its forms: married love, the intimacy of family and marriage—we congratulate again Robert and Jane Brawley, as well as Marilyn and Hedge Hedgpeth on their many years of committed married love—in and through our love for one another, from marriage to the summer of service, to the month of mission, to the care and compassion we have for those struggling in need—in and through all of that love, we experience, if we’re attentive to it, a greater love, a bigger love, a larger love that puts us in touch with a God who sustains us, who encourages us, and saves us.

I believe that the story we just heard from the first book of Kings gives us a real example of the power and presence of God in the ordinary ways in which we conduct and live our lives. But this story of Elijah on the run or Elijah on the lam is in dramatic juxtaposition to the story you heard about Elijah and his battle with the prophets of Baal several weeks ago when Katie Owen was here preaching on the occasion of honoring our students graduating from high school and college. Let me

summarize that briefly so you get a sense of the dramatic difference between the two accounts: one following the other in the Elijah cycle from Mount Carmel to Mount Horeb.

The people of God, the people of Israel were beginning to follow the prophets of Baal in claiming that Baal was the one true God. This angered Elijah. So he challenged the prophets of Baal to a contest. It was one of those “make my day” kind of contests, one of those gunfights at the O.K. Corral. “You truss up your young bull on the altar and I will do the same; you prepare the sacrifice, and you call on your god. Go ahead and do it.” So the prophets of Baal accepted the challenge, all 450 of them. They trussed up their young bull, they prayed to their god asking for his intervention to light the fire of the holocaust, consume it, and prove once and for all that the god of the prophets of Baal was the one true god.

One of my favorite parts of the storyline is the cockiness of Elijah confident in ultimate success, almost like a sporting event. Elijah began to taunt the prophets. He walked around them and asked, “Where is your god? Is he asleep? Is he meditating? Is he on a journey? Come on, what’s going on here?” He taunted them, he booed them from the sidelines, and they exhausted themselves from noon until midnight, trying to convince their god to answer their plea and prove to Elijah that he was wrong.

And then it was Elijah’s turn. He dug a trench around his altar, prepared the sacrifice, and he began to pour water in it—not one time, not two times, but three times he poured water, overflowing the trench to make it harder for God to light the fire. He was in good form, convinced that God would answer his prayer and show up all the prophets of Baal. After all of this preparation, after all his convictions of the moment, he said, “Answer me, O God, answer me so that these people may know that you, O Lord, are God! Lord God, the bull!” And then there comes a lightning bolt of fire that consumes the bull on the altar, and the people immediately believed with their response: “Oh, Lord, you are our God! O Lord, you indeed are our God!”

What immediately followed was the worst winner in the history of altar fights.

They are caught up in the immediate conviction of the moment, and with the passion and enthusiasm and fanaticism, the prophet Elijah and his people seized the prophets of Baal, took them down to the brook, and killed them all.

That is where we begin with our story today because Jezebel hears about it through Ahab and says in a very convoluted way, “What you did to my prophets, I’m going to do to you.” You would think Elijah would be full of conviction, stand up, and take on Jezebel just like he did the prophets of Baal, but he became afraid for his life, and he ran. He got up and fled for his life. Finally, as he ran into the desert full of hopelessness and despair and a sense of no purpose, he crawls under a broom tree and prays for God to take his life. Yet, God doesn’t answer the prayer but comes to him in the form of an angel, a messenger. The messenger pushes him and says, “Look, I have some food and drink for you. Eat and drink!” He eats and drinks and falls back asleep. The angel comes again and says, “Eat and drink because the journey will be too much for you.” So he finally listens. Strengthened by that food, he goes to Mount Horeb, which is Sinai, where the covenant was formed, where the Ten Commandments were delivered. He went back to the source of his energy and life. There, God was present to him with a presence and power through the whispering of the wind and touches his life to keep on being faithful to his prophetic mission.

It’s pretty clear that we are given to understand in this account that the real hunger Elijah experiences is not just simply a hunger for food and physical sustenance. It’s a hunger for hope. It’s a hunger for a sense of purpose. It’s a hunger that all of us can identify with in our journey of life. Look at our situations of life. His situation is not much different than ours, particularly when we experience under the broom tree the cloud of mushrooms that hangs over the head of our world with nuclear issues in North Korea, in Iran, all these macro issues of markets collapsing, war and rumors of war, terrorism in Boston, natural disasters. We know we live in a dangerous world, but more micro and more specific we know as well the challenges of unemployment, the challenges of divorce, of relationships that are struggling to find forgiveness and healing. We know all that. I think we can identify with Elijah under the broom tree in our need to return to the source of energy that will give us life and sustenance and encouragement to move on so that

the touch of God in our lives gives us the courage to get on with it with confidence and a deep joy.

That is why I encourage you to take advantage of our coming together in prayer at worship each Sunday. I encourage you to take advantage of reflection on the Scriptures prior to our worship together on Sundays. I challenge you to go on retreats with the women and the men. I challenge you to take advantage of any spiritual companionship that gets you in touch with this greater and larger love that we experience through our journey in faith, even when we're locked with despair in the wilderness.

No matter what burdens you bear, no matter what fears you experience, no matter what losses you grieve, there is a message of hope and a message of new purpose embodied in the story of the great cycle of readings from Elijah. It is not immediate conviction and passionate commitment that ultimately gave meaning to his life in his return neither to the mountain of God nor for that matter in ours too. It is the gentle hospitable touch of God that gave him the courage to go on. Elijah is about to give up. The touch of God for him and for us is the power to go on.

Influences: John Shea
Monika Hellwig