

## The 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

### Text: 1 Kings 19:9b-21

<sup>9</sup>There he came to a cave and lodged in it. And behold, the word of the LORD came to him, and he said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" <sup>10</sup>He said, "I have been very jealous for the LORD, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away." <sup>11</sup>And he said, "Go out and stand on the mount before the LORD." And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. <sup>12</sup>And after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire the sound of a low whisper. <sup>13</sup>And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. And behold, there came a voice to him and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" <sup>14</sup>He said, "I have been very jealous for the LORD, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away." <sup>15</sup>And the LORD said to him, "Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus. And when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael to be king over Syria. <sup>16</sup>And Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall anoint to be king over Israel, and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah you shall anoint to be prophet in your place. <sup>17</sup>And the one who escapes from the sword of Hazael shall Jehu put to death, and the one who escapes from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha put to death. <sup>18</sup>Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him." <sup>19</sup>So he departed from there and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen in front of him, and he was with the twelfth. Elijah passed by him and cast his cloak upon him. <sup>20</sup>And he left the oxen and ran after Elijah and said, "Let me kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow you." And he said to him, "Go back again, for what have I done to you?" <sup>21</sup>And he returned from following him and took the yoke of oxen and sacrificed them and boiled their flesh with the yokes of the oxen and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he arose and went after Elijah and assisted him.

### Theme: How God's Word Works

The most frustrated people in the Bible were, without a doubt, the prophets of the Old Testament. Moses once complained to God, "*If this is the way that you are going to treat me, kill me right now.*" (Num 11:15) Jeremiah complained, "*Cursed be the day that I was born.*" (Jer 20:14) In our text Elijah complained that he had done everything that was asked of him, and yet no one listened. He was the only prophet left. It seemed to all of the prophets as though they were wasting their breath when they preached. Their words only seemed to get them into a lot of trouble. We might not be as frustrated as the prophets of old, but there are those times when we also can become very frustrated in our witness for the Lord today. In this text God showed Elijah how His Word works.

I. We would love it if God's Word created faith in spectacular ways.

That was the point of the earthquake, wind, and fire at Mount Sinai. You would think that God would have revealed Himself in one of those spectacular ways, but He was not in any of those things. Those are not the things that created faith. The way from Egypt to the promised land was a good example of that. Moses parted the Red Sea. God appeared in fire and smoke at Mount Sinai. He fed Israel every day with Manna. Yet, none of those things helped the people to trust in God. They complained after every one of those events, that God was bringing them into the desert to die. Our

text comes after Elijah's contest with the prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel. The Lord proved that He is God with fire from heaven. The people shouted, "*The Lord, He is God.*" But Queen Jezebel was so angry that she made an oath to kill Elijah, and he had to flee for his life to Mount Sinai. We even see this in Jesus' ministry. The event that made the Sanhedrin decide that He had to die was when he raised Lazarus from the dead. None of those spectacular events brought anyone to faith.

But today we still think that it will take those kinds of events for people to come to faith in Jesus. Churches everywhere are searching for the right recipe that would bring a lot of people and convert them all. We think that people want splash. Or maybe if God would just do something to show the world that He is God as when fire came from heaven at Mt. Carmel, then people would believe. Why can't He convert thousands of people and fill our churches today, such as when Peter preached on Pentecost or when we reflect on "the good old days." The same is true for our families. We look for the magic bullet that will keep our kids and grandkids in the faith. In our personal witness, we wish that God would use us in great ways to share the Gospel with the world. But the same is also true in our personal lives. There are those times when we wrestle with our faith. We wonder what God is doing. He isn't working the way that we would expect in our lives. Sometimes we even wonder whether He is there. We wish that He would shout, "Here I am! I'm right here with you." But the fact of the matter is that God seldom works in spectacular ways. Those things seldom bring faith anyway. God could shout down from heaven to the entire world, "I'm here," and it wouldn't make any difference in the amount of people who believe in Him.

## II. God works in some very quiet ways.

It is that way throughout the Bible. God appeared to Elijah in the still small voice. Think of all of the prophets. They were not dressed in fine clothing. They didn't live in palaces. Elijah was often homeless, and his garment was a hairy animal skin. Then we think of our Savior Jesus. This Christmas hymn describes His birth so well, "**How quietly, how quietly, the wondrous gift is given.**" He was born in a stable and laid in a manger. He was raised in a town of which Nathaniel said, "*Can anything good come from Nazareth?*" Very few people came to faith through Jesus' miracles. In fact, at the end of most of those stories, more people rejected Him than those who believed in Him. But when He said, "*It is finished,*" from the cross, the centurion confessed, "*Surely this man was the Son of God.*" Throughout the book of Acts, it was the simple Gospel that Jesus died and rose for the forgiveness of our sins, that brought people to faith. God's voice is a still, small voice.

It is that way for each of us also. What is it that especially helps you to grow in your faith? It is almost always the little things. It was the parents who brought you to the baptismal font where simple water was poured over your head. Those same parent read Bible stories to you as a child and taught you to pray. It was the friend who reminded you of God's forgiveness and help in every time of need. It was those church services that seemed like nothing special, but your week just isn't the same if it doesn't start in this place. Most surprising of all. When you receive that little piece of bread and a sip of wine, it performs a miracle as the body and blood of our Lord remind us that Jesus gave His body and shed His blood for the forgiveness of my sins.

That is the heart of the still small voice, the forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ. We know that we are all sinners. There have been plenty of times in our lives when we rejected God's Word and

will, just as the people of Israel rejected Elijah's message, but Christ gave His innocent life for the forgiveness of our sins. He rose victory. The still small voice is that God sent His Son for the forgiveness of our sins, and that through faith in Him we are God's children, He is our Father, and nothing can ever separate us from His love. That still small voice calls on us to trust in Him as our Savior.

III. God will bless our work as we share that simple quiet Gospel.

He blessed Elijah's work. God sent Elijah back to Israel to continue His work. He was to anoint kings and a prophet to follow him. Things were not as bad as Elijah thought. There were still 7,000 people in Israel who had worshiped Baal. God's word had been active, and it would continue to be.

God also sends us into our callings in life. There was a time when Martin Luther became frustrated that the people lost their enthusiasm for the Reformation. On January 1, 1530 he ended his sermon in the Stadtkirche in Wittenberg with these words, "**I would rather preach to mad dogs, for my preaching shows no effect among you, and it only makes me weary.**" He was so frustrated that he stopped preaching for a time, but by June 25 of that same year, those same people, who had frustrated him so much, were willing to stand before the emperor and risk their lives for the sake of their faith when they presented the Augsburg Confession.

Every pastor goes through those times when we wonder whether our work has been worth it, but God also gives those glimpses of the faith and Christian love of those whom we serve. It's that way for parents too. Sometimes we worry and fret about our kids or grandkids. What happened to the faith that we tried to instill in them? Then suddenly God gives us a glimpse that they have indeed built their lives on the rock of Christ. For us as a congregation and in our personal witness, it sometimes seems as though no one listens anymore, but then we have those times when we see how the Holy Spirit has blessed our witness despite all of our personal weaknesses and fears, and it gives us great joy.

In our own lives, there are times when we feel that our own faith is failing. We wish that we could trust God more and live the kind of love that He would like us to. We are afraid that we are falling. Then, usually in that quiet way, His Word strengthens our faith and makes us even more sure of His grace and mercy for us. For me personally those times are always when I make those trips to Germany. The services are much less lively and slower than ours in the States, but there is something about them that always refreshes my faith in Christ.

How does God's Word work? To both Elijah's and our surprise, it doesn't need a lot of flash. It is a quiet word of forgiveness, peace, and hope in Christ. But that Word of the Gospel contains the power of the Holy Spirit, the power that is able to make us wise for salvation. May that Gospel work in each of our hearts to give us that faith and hope in Christ our Savior.

Amen.

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