

Proper 8C – God restores us with a whisper

1. The events recorded in our OT lesson from I Kings took place nearly 3000 years ago probably the 850s or 60s BC
 - a. And yet you could have almost plucked the context for them from today's headlines
 - i. You see, like so often happens with our reading selections (pericopes), this one picks up in the middle of events
 - ii. We find Elijah, the mighty prophet, on Mt. Horeb (Sinai – the mountain of the Lord) speaking with God
 - iii. But why is he here?
 - iv. That is answered in one of the most gripping accounts recorded in Scripture – the showdown between Elijah the prophet for God and the 450 prophets of the idol Baal supported by evil King Ahab and his wife Jezebel.
 - b. So, to provide a little context for Elijah on the mountain let's look at what happened before this from I Kings 18
 - i. Scripture is replete with some of the best drama you could ever read but it's not fictional, these events occurred by the power of almighty God!
 - ii. In chapter 18 God sends Elijah to confront King Ahab for his wicked ways in leading the northern kingdom of Israel into idolatry along with his wife Jezebel – they are two of the most evil rulers recorded
 - iii. Isaiah challenges Ahab to a showdown between all of his priests of Baal and himself saying, **“How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him.”** (I Ki 18:21)
 - c. Elijah then asks that two bulls be prepared for sacrifice, one to Baal and one to God and whoever's priests can call down fire to consume the sacrifice that is Israel's God.
 - i. The prophets of Baal go first and despite cutting themselves and chanting for hours nothing happens.
 - ii. Through it all Elijah taunts them (this is where Scripture is great!), **“Cry aloud, for he is a god. Either he is musing, or he is relieving himself, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened.”** (I Ki 18:27)
 - iii. Finally, when they are exhausted to continue Isaiah has his bull drenched in water for good measure and he prays, **“O LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that you are God in Israel, and that I am your servant, and that I have done all these things at your word.”** (I Ki 18:36)

- iv. Fire then falls from the sky and consumes the sacrifice, the people realize that Elijah serves the Lord, and he commands that all the prophets of Baal be killed.
 - d. This did not go over well with King Ahab and Queen Jezebel – they weren't moved to repentance at all.
 - i. In fact, just the opposite Jezebel sends a messenger to Elijah saying, **“So may the gods do to me and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by this time tomorrow.”** (I Ki 19:2)
 - ii. So, as brave as Elijah was in facing down the prophets of Baal, he realizes that his life is truly in danger, and he gets out of Dodge fast.
 - iii. And as he makes his way down to Mt Horeb/Sinai we can see that he is in despair, **“It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers.”** (I Ki 19:4)
 - iv. Elijah wanted it all to end, he'd carried out the Lord's will, preached His word and all it had gotten him was danger and trouble.
- 2. But when he arrives at Horeb the Lord had other plans for him and He would restore Elijah not with an overwhelming show of power and glory but with a whisper, and that's where we pick up today.
 - a. Isn't this account great!? Do you see how much the back story informs and enlivens the reading for today?
 - i. I don't know if you've ever felt like Elijah but many of us in the ministry would like to think that we have, but our woes in America are nothing like what he faced.
 - ii. But there are many of our brothers preaching in other lands that truly do face the reality of death for their faith even today, by one report 900,000 Christians were killed for their faith in the last decade!
 - iii. But even though you and I don't face dangerous persecution (yet), we still live in a land not unlike Israel that chooses to follow anything else rather than God.
 - iv. And while most of you grew up in an era where church membership was seen as a positive thing, we now live in an America that (like Elijah's day) largely has a negative opinion of believers – we too can feel like Elijah on the run.
 - b. As Elijah gets to the mountain of the Lord, the Lord asks him, **“What are you doing here, Elijah?”** (I Ki 19:9)
 - i. And Elijah responds, **“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.”** (I Ki 19:10)

- ii. And the Lord tells Elijah to go out and stand on the mountain and wait for Him.
 - iii. And a great wind tears at the mountain followed by an earthquake followed by fire, but Scripture records that the Lord was not in the wind or the earthquake or the fire. (I Ki 19:11-12)
 - c. Then Elijah hears the sound of a low whisper, and he goes out to meet God.
 - i. And the Lord again asks him why he is there to which he responded with the same words, **“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...”** (I Ki 19:14)
 - ii. But the Lord doesn’t chastise Elijah for his actions or feelings.
 - iii. No, the Lord restored Elijah with that whisper reminding him that he still had work to do, **“Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus...anoint Hazael to be king over Syria. And Jehu...anoint to be king over Israel, and Elisha...anoint to be prophet in your place...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.”** (I ki 19:15-18)
- 3. That’s the way the Lord most often chooses to work among His people - quietly
 - a. As Christ Himself said, **“But I am among you as the one who serves.”** (Lk 22:27)
 - i. Our Lord didn’t come to us in His divine majesty and power but humble and approachable – more like the whisper on Mt Sinai than the wind, fire and earthquake.
 - ii. He saved us by laying down His life for ours, taking our place on the cross
 - iii. And He continues to come to us in the same way, hidden and cloaked in humble means – the ordinary water used in baptism, in the bread and wine of communion, His Word read and spoken – **He restores with a whisper**
 - b. All of this He does for you, just as He did for Elijah, to comfort and restore His wearied people
 - i. After the landmark decision by the Supreme Court regarding Roe v Wade on Friday, which we welcome, our country has once again descended into division and madness.
 - ii. You may begin to feel like Elijah, **“I have been very jealous for the LORD. The people of America have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and I, even I only, am left.”**
 - iii. Come, meet the Lord where He promises to be found – not in the force of arms or the rule of law or displays of righteous anger but here in His house where He promises to restore you

- iv. And, like Elijah, He reminds you that you are not alone, you still have a purpose and He sends you out to carry on His mission of witnessing to the hope you have in Christ.