

“Part of God’s Plan”
by Rev. Frances Savill
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1 Kings 19:1-18

This morning, our scripture reading gives us a special insight into the life of one of God's great prophets, Elijah.

Elijah was going through one of those lowest of low times.

We meet up with Elijah in chapter 19 with him running away, in fear of his life from King Ahab and Queen Jezebel. We heard Elijah cry out to God, in utter discouragement and despair “Let me die”. “There is no one else left who is faithful, just let me die in the wilderness, Lord.”

Elijah is in great need of encouragement, renewal and a Sabbath rest in God.

Some of you know what it is to be weary, wanting to give up, feeling very much alone. I doubt that there is anyone who doesn't feel that way at some point in their lives.

Elijah had just defeated all Jezebel's prophets of Baal. It was a great contest; the object was to discover which God was the Lord. The people of Israel had been worshiping both God and the idols of Baal.

There was a sort of cook-off affair; Elijah versus the 450 prophets of Baal. Both built altars, both put meat offerings on the altars, and wood under them, both would call on their god, and ask their god to send fire to consume the offering. The god that delivered fire was the God to worship.

From early morning to noon in the day, the prophets of Baal were yelling and calling out to Baal. Nothing happened. They cut themselves, as was their custom, until the blood was gushing, but still nothing happened.

Elijah rebuilt the altar to God that had been torn down, using 12 stones for the 12 tribes of Israel. Then he placed the meat offering on the altar, put the wood under it, then poured water on the offering, the altar and the wood, and called on the name of the Lord God of Israel.

God sent fire that consumed the offering, the wood, the water, the stone altar and the dust. All the gathered people fell on their faces before the Lord, worshiping in awe and wonder. Elijah ordered that the people seize the false prophets of Baal and kill them.

King Ahab witnessed all that happened. He returned to his home and told Queen Jezebel. She swore that she would do to Elijah what he had done to her 450 prophets. So, Elijah ran and hid himself in the wilderness, discouraged, alone, exhausted. His words to God: Let me die here and now.

Elijah had an amazing victory. He alone had challenged and defeated the 450 prophets of Baal. All the people saw God's victory and worshiped God.

Discouragement doesn't always come after defeat, exhaustion. The need for God's hand, God's assurance, God's care, can come after wonderful, wearying victories.

Notice what God does. God doesn't tell Elijah something spiritual like "just trust me," nor does God say something Calvinist like, "pull yourself up by your bootstraps." God doesn't chastise Elijah, rather God cares for him.

God gives Elijah rest. God knows that we are made of frail flesh. Jesus, when He came to earth didn't take some supernatural body, He didn't hover 6" above the ground, He took our flesh that gets weary, needs rest, and food and water.

God gave Elijah sleep, rest. God spoke only to send ministering angels to wake Elijah with food and drink.

In times of discouragement, in times when you are weary and in need of a Sabbath rest, or time to rest in God, first you may need sleep, and physical nourishment.

Some of you have been God's ministering angels who have provided food and drink for those who are struggling. You bring food to the sick, or the worn, or the grieving. Many times, spiritual healing can't occur, life and ministry can't go on, until those basic needs are met. Your gifts of food, or cooking, are ministries of healing, you do God's work in the lives of others.

God let Elijah sleep a long time, and God fed Elijah not once, not twice, but three times. Then God sent Elijah on a journey.

Elijah, the prophet of God who had spoken God's word, had seen the mighty hand of God defeat the prophets of Baal, needed God's presence, needed God's word for him.

I wonder what Elijah had expected after he defeated the false prophets. Had he thought that in proving the Lord was the living God, all would suddenly become well? Had he thought that Ahab and Jezebel and all the people would repent and worship God alone?

Signs and wonders, in and of themselves, rarely bring faith. Jesus' ministry proved that. Whatever Elijah had expected, it didn't happen. So, Elijah went up on the mountain to a cave to find the presence of God. Elijah sought God.

Sabbath rest, renewal, is not only physical rest, but spiritual renewal. We need to seek God, and at least some of that time should be alone and or in silence.

It's interesting that Elijah has to wait on God. God doesn't just appear to Elijah and the story's over. Rather, Elijah waits and watches and for some time does not see God.

Great events happen, a mighty wind comes, so great that it splits rocks, then an earthquake comes, and finally fire fell. God had used fire as a sign to Israel, but God was not in the fire.

Finally, God revealed himself to Elijah in the silence.

Often, we find silence a bit threatening. We are uncertain what we will find in it. We are so accustomed to filling the silence with some noise, be it music, or TV, humming, or whistling. We find it hard to be still in the quiet, listening for the voice of God.

But silence was the place where Elijah again heard God's voice and was given God's presence, and the strength to carry on his work in God's name.

Elijah, in his discouragement had lost perspective. He had also lost a sense of God's work. Elijah was only one part of God's plan. Elijah was a great prophet of God and was a wonderful witness and worker for God. But he was just one part.

Twice God asked Elijah why he was there. Twice Elijah answered - **I** have been very zealous. **I** alone am left.

Elijah had lost sight of the greatness of God, that God was at work in everything, and that he/Elijah was only one small part of God's plan.

God had people and plans Elijah knew nothing about. God had 2 men to anoint as kings, there were 7000 people who had not bowed down to Baal, and God had chosen a disciple for Elijah, a man who would replace him. Elijah was not alone. There were over 7000 faithful.

Elijah may have been surprised and dismayed at what happened after he defeated the prophets of Baal, but God was not. God's plans are eternal. God was in control, not King Ahaz, not Queen Jezebel, not Elijah, but God.

Elijah's rest in God, gave him back perspective and made him aware of God's action in the world. In being renewed, in encountering God's presence, in resting in God, Elijah was able to continue his work for God.

Rest puts our work back into perspective. Resting in God is necessary for all God's people, no matter what their work.

Jesus said, Come to me all you who are weary and carrying heavy burdens and I will give you rest. Take my yoke and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

Elijah, in his time of rest, found the easy yoke, the light burden, rest for his soul, and the presence of God so he could go forward again.
When was the last time you rested in God?

Let us pray:

O Lord, we lead busy lives, we pride ourselves on our overloaded schedules. But too often we lose perspective, our loads become heavy, and we become weary. Help us Lord, to still ourselves before you, find some space and time, that we might worship, that we might seek you, that we might be healed and regain perspective. Lord, you are God alone. You are Lord, and our work is only a very small part of your whole plan. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.