

THE GRACE AND MERCY OF GOD'S PATIENCE

Hear again the Word of God for this fifth Sunday after Trinity:

And he said, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God of hosts; because the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life."¹

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

Happy Anniversary!

Today is our eleventh anniversary together. When we were joined through the Rite of Installation, God united us as one in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Through the years it is this shared confession that has held us together. It will be that confession of Christ-crucified for the forgiveness of sins, brought into our ears through the pure proclamation of the genuine Gospel and the right administration of God's Sacraments that will keep us firm as times, in the Church in our country become more troubled.

For some our number, and for me in particular, there have been times in the past decade where Elijah's words were accurate echoes of our thinking:

And he said, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God of hosts; because the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life."²

Those words were borne of frustration, loneliness and personal pain. And they were spoken without the firm faith that God's people are called to hold onto in this life. Whenever a believer, and Elijah was one just as you are, despondent about the lack of faith displayed in his family, his countrymen, his world, cries out to God for death,

¹ I Kings 19:14.

² I Kings 19:14.

that he will not have to endure more suffering on account of the Faith, this exhibits the sin that is in us.

Elijah, faced with innumerable proofs of God's providence and protection in his life, even while being pursued for speaking the Truth, turns from his calling and asks to be delivered into the Church Triumphant. He's had enough of the Church Militant!

Perhaps you have faced such spiritual turmoil in your life? Maybe your family members - siblings, children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren - have rejected the faith. That is becoming more common in our era. Just eleven years ago, I learned to ask of people in our area, "What church do you attend?" when I met them. They may not have attended in years, but they still associated with a congregation.

Now, however, one cannot ask the question, "what church do you attend?" for many people moving into our neighborhoods do not even have a casual acquaintance with a church body. Instead, I have learned to ask something along these lines, "who is Jesus to you?" And, I have become less amazed that the response is, "I really don't know."

Such answers do lead one to think as Elijah was on the mountain, even after having been fed with bread by God. As God did not leave that prophet in his state of spiritual agony and doubt, so He does not leave us in ours. This is displayed for us when God, even before Elijah voices his main complaint to the Lord, and his request for deliverance.

Then He said, "Go out, and stand on the mountain before the LORD." And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces 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; and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice.³

God shows Himself in creation first. He is calling Elijah to repentance using that which Elijah should have known to display God's grace. He does the same for you. He gave the sun to rise today. He created the flowers on the plants in your yards through the processes He developed in His mind before the foundation of the world. How often we humans forget God when we look at His creation.

The first three creative events were to evoke judgment thoughts in the prophet. After all, by soon asking to be removed from the midst of sinners, he was asking for the saving Word to be taken finally and completely from them!

Wind, earthquake and fire bring forth the shaking and dissolution of creation. We have that record of future events outlined for us in the Book of Revelation, in Daniel and Ezekiel. These elements also bring forth remembrances of Moses and the Israelites' encounter with God at Sinai. God shows His majesty in them, but He does not show Himself.

This is because, out of His grace and mercy, God has determined that that day of the prophet's despair is not to be Judgment Day. That Day would come – and it began on the Good Friday when the sky darkened, the earth quaked, and the Son of God died upon the cross. It continued as He, in the flesh, as our creeds confess, descended

³ I Kings 19:11-12

into Hell's fiery abyss to declare His victory. And, it awaits a future day, when all these elements will pass away in a rush of cleansing fire and the Lord creates the New Heavens and New Earth for His faithful people.

So, how did God show Himself that day when Elijah asked for the Word to be removed from the world?

God came forth as a still, small voice. Literally, that is, "a tone of gentle blowing."⁴ This shows that God does not want to remove His Word from creation, that there are more people who will yet enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Thank God, for that gave you and me an opportunity to come into the Church! What is the reaction to the Word of salvation – meekness – as our text continues:

So it was, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave. Suddenly a voice came to him, and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

The Word asks what He already knows. God sees the hearts and minds of His people. He knows what is troubling Elijah, and He knows what troubles you. Yet God still asks - as a call to repentance to His child. The Word brings forth the heart thoughts of the man, and he, though he does not yet realize it, pours forth his confession.

¹⁴ And he said, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God of hosts; because the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life."

Elijah fears for His Lord. He wants God's vengeance. He wants the sin about him to end. He has a different understanding of God than God has just again revealed

⁴ KD, p. 182.

about Himself. And how does God answer? Does He deliver Elijah and destroy the world?

¹⁵ Then the LORD said to him: "Go, return on your way to the Wilderness of Damascus; and when you arrive, anoint Hazael as king over Syria. ¹⁶ Also you shall anoint Jehu the son of Nimshi as king over Israel. And Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel Meholah you shall anoint as prophet in your place. ¹⁷ It shall be that whoever escapes the sword of Hazael, Jehu will kill; and whoever escapes the sword of Jehu, Elisha will kill. ¹⁸ Yet I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him."

It is the Word that will do the killing. None of this, save the anointing of Elisha took place before Elijah's assumption into heaven.

God who sees more than even his best believers can, shows that there are thousands of believers yet among the apostate people. Two numbers are used, seven, the number of God's rest, and ten cubed, the number of completion.

¹⁹ So he departed from there, and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he was with the twelfth. Then Elijah passed by him and threw his mantle on him. ²⁰ And he left the oxen and ran after Elijah, and said, "Please 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?"

²¹ So Elisha turned back from him, and took a yoke of oxen and slaughtered them and boiled their flesh, using the oxen's equipment, and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he arose and followed Elijah, and became his servant.⁵

⁵The New King James Version. 1996, c1982 . Thomas Nelson: Nashville

The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus

Trinity V (*LSB* One-year series)

I Kings 19:11-21; I Peter 3:8-15; Luke 5:1-11

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Pastor Michael A. Morehouse

SOLI DEO GLORIA