

"Where Is God?" 1 Kings 19:11-21 Trinity 5 2023

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Elijah is an amazing prophet. God did things through Elijah that would take your breath away! This account comes right after the trial between the prophets of Baal and Elijah. He prayed and God sent fire from heaven to consume the offering of Elijah, proving that He and not Baal was the true God. Then Elijah commanded that the people kill the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of Asherah, the fertility goddess. They did that because the law of Israel was that the false prophet should die.

Then Elijah ended a three-year drought by prayer, and outran the chariot of Ahab back to Jezreel in a feat of God-given prophetic activity. Of course, when Jezebel heard about the death of her favorite prophets, she promised Elijah that she would settle for nothing less than his immediate death. So, Elijah ran for his life. He ran a day's worth out into the wilderness, and collapsed of exhaustion. God fed him miraculously, and the text says that Elijah ran in the strength of that food for forty days all the way to Horeb - Mt. Sinai, the mountain of God. That is where our text picks up. Elijah is complaining to God that his lot is hard, and his enemies are powerful and they seek to kill him.

The Word of the Lord comes to Elijah and tells him to stand outside and face God! The Bible says that the Lord was passing by. Elijah stood there and a powerful wind blew. It was so terrible that it broke rocks and tore up the landscape. But God was not in that powerful

## "Where Is God?" 1 Kings 19:11-21 Trinity 5 2023

wind. Then there was an earthquake – but God was not present in the earthquake. He caused it, but it wasn't the sign of His presence. Then there was a terrible fire. God often used fire, but He wasn't in the fire this time, either.

Then there was the sound of a gentle breeze blowing. Elijah hears this gentle sound and knows by his prophetic vision that God is present in that still, small voice of the breeze, gently blowing. Elijah wraps his face in his mantle, knowing that sinful man cannot come face to face with the holy God and live, and he steps out to present his case before the Lord.

Elijah felt defeated and hopeless. We might think that it was odd, considering the miracle God worked through him, but we need to remember the threats and dangers he faced, too. He obviously felt alone. He felt exposed. He felt in danger. He ran to find God. In his time of need, it would be reasonable for him to find God in the powerful things – the wind, the earthquake, or the fire. But that is not where he found God. He found God in the sound of the gentle blowing of the breeze. The power of the Almighty God was concealed in the seeming weakness of the gentle breeze.

We also need to remember that God's power is not evident in the big things, nor does His favor reveal itself in how well we are doing, or how comfortable things get, or how many people are with us. The evidence of God's favor and love for us is the cross of Jesus Christ. It

## "Where Is God?" 1 Kings 19:11-21 Trinity 5 2023

was on the cross that God demonstrated His love by taking our guilt and shame and nailing it to the cross forever. When Jesus rose from the grave, He demonstrated the truth of our forgiveness, and showed us both the power of God and the depth of His love for us. Your sins have been forgiven! God has poured out on each of us that believe His promise: the free gift of eternal life. He has in fact poured it out on all men and women everywhere, but it can only be grasped and possessed by faith – by trusting God to deal with us as He has promised to deal with us for the sake of Jesus Christ.

When Elijah ran to God's holy mountain, God asked him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" He didn't ask because He did not know. God had refreshed Elijah, and sustained him for the journey to the mountain. No, the question was asked for Elijah, that Elijah could pour out his heart and his troubles, and then God could remind him that he was never alone. God is always with His people, and He knows who His people are.

In the entire nation of Israel, a couple million people strong at this point, there were only seven thousand who were truly God's people. They were the ones who had not turned to idolatry. They had not bowed to Baal – that means to worship him or pray to him – nor had they kissed him – another worship practice, showing devotion to Baal. In modern terms, they had not given up their confession, trusted expedience over

## "Where Is God?" 1 Kings 19:11-21 Trinity 5 2023

God's truth, or given in to the temptation to be more "relevant", modern, or effective.

That's what Baal and Asherah stood for, you know. They were fertility gods. They were the popular deities of the day. They were fun to worship, and absolutely no one, but a few stick-in-the-muds like Elijah, saw anything wrong with them, or spending their time and energy on them, or casually worshiping them. It was the "in-thing" to do. Many people probably did it without thinking much about it. They couldn't see the harm. They weren't serious about it. Everyone was doing it. It was like reading your daily horoscope or buying a ticket every week in the lottery today.

But God knew. It was idolatry. It was unfaithfulness. It was the first commandment. It made a difference with God. Out of the whole nation, just 7,000. Those were God's people. The rest were not. They were a small and insignificant minority – insignificant to everyone but God, and one another. And God had a plan.

So, we are Lutherans. We are old-fashioned, confessional Lutherans. We are not up-to-date. We are not all modern and with it. We still use the liturgy, still preach God's Word plainly. We sing antique hymns of the faith instead of modern "praise songs". We cling to the ancient Christian practice of "closed communion." We take a lot of criticism and mocking – and sometimes some downright persecution.

"Where Is God?" 1 Kings 19:11-21 Trinity 5 2023

God still knows. God is still with His people. God still knows who is faithful and who is not, and which people have kissed the Baals of our age and which ones have not. God knows those who are His and He knows those who are not. And He still has a plan.

We do not need to run to the mountain of the Lord. We are the mountain of the Lord. We don't need to go anywhere to find God, but to His Word. And God is still asking us, "What are you doing here?" He isn't asking because He doesn't know, and He isn't asking to accuse you of anything. He is asking to invite you to pray, to pour out your heart to Him, and then to hear that He has you in His sight, He loves you, and He has saved you and forgiven you and given eternal life to you. He has a plan, and you are not alone. God is with you, and all those other faithful people of God, many of them Lutherans. All who have not bowed to the false gods and ideologies and theologies and movements and fads of the day, and all who have not kissed the Baals – giving themselves over to that which is not faithful just because others have, or because it looks fun, or because it seems like it would work better in today's world. God knows those who are His and who trust in Him alone.

Where is God? He is in His Word, and in the Sacrament. He is in His holy people. He is here today – and amid all those who call upon Him in humble faith. Therefore, fear not! God is not in the trappings of power and success. He is hidden in the seeming weakness of His Word, of His Sacraments, and of the humble-looking groups of those who

"Where Is God?" 1 Kings 19:11-21 Trinity 5 2023

faithfully call upon Him. He is hidden in the humility of Jesus and the apparent weakness of the cross. But the weakness is only an illusion. He is still the Almighty God, who has a plan, and that plan is our salvation! Amen.