

Semon; Nov 2, 2025. Grace Lutheran & Czech Presbyterian: Curtis Olson: 1 Kings 19:1-18

The prophet Elijah is having a rough month. You would think that he would feel pretty triumphant. In chapter 18 of the First Book of Kings, he has defeated the priests of Baal in a head-to-head competition between the tribal gods of Samaria and the God of Israel. This is followed by death-threats from Jezebel and self-doubts about the faith of the nation of Israel.

He goes out from the city, a day's journey into the wilderness. He finds a hospitable-looking bush, sits under it, and prays to die. "I've had enough, Lord," he says to God (and to the bush.)

Have we not all been THERE? – After a rough day at work, after a defeat in the game, after an argument with family. Maybe not praying to DIE, but hiding from everything, under a blanket, a pillow, or a bush.

An angel, feeds him, encourages him, and points the way to a long journey toward recovery.

Again, familiar ground. I think we all have had those dark, questioning hours in our lives, and we all have had an angel pick us up and point the way forward with an encouraging word and some warm bread. It sounds nice!

The moments Elijah takes for himself, the encouraging words from the angel, and the meal, give Elijah the strength and grit to walk forty days to Mount Horeb. (Maybe there were some additional snacks along the way.) This is the mountain also known as Mount Sinai, where Moses received the Ten Commandments. This is a likely place for a conversation with God, but, after the walk, Elijah, goes into a cave to sleep. He is awakened by the word of the Lord, who asks what he is doing in a cave. He's still in a funk. He tells God that he still has doubts about his people, and being the lone prophet fighting an uphill battle against unbelievers.

The Word of God urges Elijah out of the cave, telling him that the Lord is about to pass by. A rock-shattering wind blows by, then there is an earthquake, then a great fire. Great, powerful forces – and

God is in NONE of them. After all of that, when God DOES come to Elijah, it is in a WHISPER. Again, too much for the prophet Elijah. He goes back to the cave, and pulls his cloak over his face. Again, it is all too much for him, and again, I think WE have all been there.

I certainly was there last week. And it was a small voice that saved me.

(I was looking for another pathway in and out of this Bible reading, and in and out of this sermon, but Pastor Kris, as always with these lay sermons, encourages us to find our personal experiences that shed light on the lessons.)

Last Friday, I had completed coordinating a complex, two-day class. An action from my manager had made the second afternoon more difficult than it needed to be. After the class, as I was putting away equipment and completing certification reports, I was in a deep funk. I was walking around with that classic thought-balloon over my head from the Peanuts comic strip, where there was nothing in the thought-bubble but a dark scribble. I was contemplating what I could say to my manager on Monday. What I might say to her that would be satisfying to my anger, but (MAYBE) not get me FIRED.

I will not claim that God talked to me, neither the Old Testament God nor the Jesus of the Trinity. More likely it was old mental debris from the Buddhist literature that I consumed very deeply in the 1990s and still dip into occasionally. Maybe it was from some old AA/twelve-step book I read when I quit drinking 35 years ago. Could it have been some bit of theology that I have read in the last few years? I really don't know where it bubbled up from

My mind was a storm – a wind, an earthquake, a fire. Then came a whisper. It was not particularly loud, or showy, or even very dramatic.

“You,” said the voice, “can decide to NOT be angry about this.”

And, literally, just like THAT, I was...peaceful. Happy. And NOT mad.

It was actually a little bit weird the way my anger immediately...evaporated after the whisper, wherever it came from.

I completed my post class work with an uncharacteristic smile. (I am not typically a “smiler.”)

After the Lord whispers to Elijah, he charges him to go back. Go back to the people who are falling from God’s word. God tells him to anoint a new king and a new prophet. There will be triumphs ahead, and seven thousand believers ready to follow the law.

On Friday, I had a call to make a journey. Not from the Lord. It was from my email. After the exhausting two days of my class (a considerably smaller task than Elijah’s forty-day walk), I felt inexplicably obliged to check my email at 5:00 on a Friday. I had a message from the hospital in Seward where I teaching a class next month. I had mailed textbooks to them, and they had not received them.

My manager is not a believer...in customer service. I was raised in a tradition that honors the customer. I know that my manager would have thought this a complete waste of my time. I grabbed the six new books, threw them in the car, fired up a fun playlist, and drove on out there. It was the best hour of my week. And I am not even going to tell my manager that I did this or claim the mileage for reimbursement.

I found the whisper that took me from Elijah’s fear and despair to my own little triumph and happiness. It was not a wind, earthquake or fire. Nothing was shattered, destroyed, or burned, except my own funk.

I hope that God, or some half-forgotten wisdom, will speak to you this week. You can look for God in the big and powerful forces. But listen for the voice in small and quiet places. May the quiet and powerful voice find you this week.

Amen. ###