

1) July 4, 2010

☉ Year C

☉ 1Kings 19:1-15

☉ Psalm 42

You heard part of this story awhile back because I thought it was an important part of Jezebel's story. Remember - Jezebel has killed the prophets of the God of Israel and so Elijah waits till he can do the same to the prophets of Baal. And when he does kill the prophets of Baal, Jezebel says, "When I get my hands on you, I will kill you Elijah" and so Elijah flees to the hills and that is where we meet him today - hiding out in a cave. That Sunday a few weeks ago was Jezebel's side of the story told by the Patriarchs. This is Elijah's side of the story told by the same people. It seems that Elijah fares better than Jezebel. But you can decide that for yourself.

Elijah is afraid - afraid for his life and so he runs to Beer-Sheba where he falls asleep under a tree. Suddenly an angel touches him on the shoulder and says to him, "Get up and eat." He does this and then goes back to sleep, the angel returns and again says, "Get up and eat." He gets up and again and he eats. Then after journeying for forty days and forty nights Elijah finds himself at Horeb, the mountain of God.

Then the word of Yahweh comes to him, "**What are you doing here Elijah?**" Elijah tells his tale of woe: "The Israelites are unfaithful, your covenant has been broken, the people have thrown down altars and killed your prophets with swords. I alone am left and they are seeking my life, to take it away."

We know that not all of this is true, if you go back to Chapter 18 where Jezebel was killing the prophets, you learn that at that time Obadiah hid 100 prophets in caves, he hid 50 to a cave, and he left them plenty of bread and water. And not a word from Elijah about why there is conflict between the worshippers of Baal and those now worshipping the One God of Israel, Yahweh. It seems Elijah is having difficulty coping with the reality of the situation.

However, regardless of how Elijah is feeling, Yahweh says to him, “Go out, go out and stand on the mountain before God, for God is about to pass by.” Elijah goes out, and there is a wind so strong that it split the mountain, and then an earthquake, and then the fire - but God was not in the wind, or the earthquake or the fire.

When everything had settled there was complete silence all around, and that was when Elijah heard the voice of God. God said, again, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” And Elijah gave God the same answer as last time. All that stuff about how bad it all was and how they were out to get him. This time God kept his promise, the promise that we heard about a few weeks back, remember? God said, “You just hang tough Elijah and I’ll have an army prepared for you.” And today that is what God tells Elijah, God says, “Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus and when you arrive the dynasty of Ahab will end. Jehu will be the successor.” And as we know Elijah will see Ahab face to face, but never Jezebel. And despite Elijah’s pessimism regarding this new religious movement 7000 people are still faithful to the God of Israel.

What is this text saying to us?

I rather like the line where God says, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” And Elijah tells some half-truths and some lies, but maybe those were the real issues at hand; and later God asks again, “What are you doing here Elijah?” and Elijah gives the same answer.

This line speaks to me because often I don’t give God very straight answers either. I might be more like Elijah than I am like Jezebel. Jezebel was a warrior - she went after what she believed and never looked back. She died for her beliefs; she died the most brutal death in the Bible.

I want to be like Jezebel, but I am more like Elijah.

This afternoon if God were to ask, “What are you doing here, Sharon?”

I would think long and hard and probably answer something like Elijah, a bit of honesty, some half-truths, some lies. I would likely say:

“Well, I am enjoying the hiking, and the forest, and I like going to the wineries, I like the church community, and my work is really hard work, sometimes I wish I had gone to Regina to work, there was a job there but this job in Vernon seemed to be a better fit. Sometimes I want to go, and flee

and seek out a cave in the mountain, and in the midst of all that I miss my friends and family. Lots of days I want to go home but I can't go, it's too far. So, like Elijah, I whine and complain, however, I want to believe that I would get to the important stuff, like: "How should I vote, or who will build homes for the homeless, or why do so many young people die from alcohol and drugs or who is going to make welfare a better resource for the poor and why has wine gone up 10% - important questions - and I'll try to keep a cool head and ask them if God should pass by and ask "What are you doing here, Sharon?"

What are you doing here?

I remember a clear sunny day on Haida Gwaii. A small group of us went to see the Rhododendron forest at Kumdis Island. We walked through the forest and we crossed the water to where the Rhododendrons were and I could see the remains of a settlement from the early 1900's. There was a long fence, part of a house, a huge meadow and a place that might have been a garden. And then, there were all those Rhododendron flowers in full bloom.

Surely, I thought, women lived here, homesteaded here with their husbands, and had children here. I turned to Gladys Noddin and I said, "Surely, God must have asked the woman, what are you doing here?" It was a powerful place and it had that silence in it where I could sense the presence of the Spirit - I could feel the holy all around me and when that happens I always wonder why is it that the presence of the Divine happens to be here. Why not somewhere else? That must have been how it was for Elijah after everything settled down and there was silence. It must have been in that sort of silence that Elijah heard the question.

I believe that it is through our relationship with one another, it is in our openness to creation and to one another that we learn how to hear the questions and the answers.

I like to think that it wasn't easy for Elijah to go back and murder Ahab and Jezebel. I like to think there was another answer. Elijah must have heard the wrong answer. Or perhaps he didn't ask the right question.

But we know, don't we, that God is a different sort of force for each and every one of us. Each one of us has our own notion of how God works in our lives. Each one of us has our conversations with God and each one of us hears what we need or want to hear. And at that time in history Elijah heard what he heard. After all, they had to win the religious battle and if they

hadn't won - well, we wouldn't be worshipping here today or at least not as Christians because our story grows out of this story.

Life is complex: God is elusive - in my experience hardly ever available - And so I want and need that experience at the Rhododendron forest because it empowers me to believe. I can come here this morning and preach a sermon with a little more ease because sometimes I experience the Spirit and that gives me reason to believe and to trust and to hope.

The spiritual experience is central to the human experience; and if we don't have an occasional glimpse at the power that sets everything in motion, the power that makes life both more and less knowable at the same time, then we struggle to understand the human condition.

In the midst of our quest for understanding then this is a good question:

“What are you doing here?”

We might all ask it of ourselves. It is not an easy question.

A wonderful moment occurs in the film, *The First Monday in October*, that eloquently makes this point. One of the Supreme Court judges returns home to find his wife packing to leave him. She complains that although he is not a bad man, he simply doesn't see her, don't feel her emotional needs. He is just blind to her and the emotional nuances of their relationship. He pleads for another chance. She finally pauses and asks him to close his eyes. She tells him that she will not divorce him if he can describe the wallpaper in their bedroom that they have occupied for twenty-five years. He can't and she leaves.

And so when we hear the question: “What are you doing here?” And when we attempt to answer it then we enter into a relationship with our inner self, with others and with God and that journey might take us places we never expected to go.

I believe it is a risky question, (you might not be able to identify the wallpaper) but nonetheless still worthwhile, it is a risky business because it pulls us to places we might not want to go, places we need to go, but would rather not, or maybe just not now, later perhaps.

As we journey and no matter what question we hear – this is the moment where opportunity is offered to be in relationship with the Holy, the Divine.

June 20C04

It is an opportunity to be vulnerable and to seek the path to knowledge and understanding of our deepest selves - it is then that we find the unintelligible available. It is then that we can let go of our arrogance and be honest with ourselves about the journey and our expectations surrounding that journey.

This morning, Elijah has taken us on an interesting journey. His story has prompted our story and it turned out better than I imagined. Of course I leave you with the question that God presented to Elijah: "What are you doing here?"

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