

June 20, 2010 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost *The Calm After the Storm*  
 FATHER'S DAY Ps. 42; 1 Kings 19:1-15a

Elijah is a man of action. He has just taken on the prophets of Baal as he boldly declared to the people of God, "How long will you go limping between 2 opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him." The people did not answer him a word." (1 Kings 18:21) At least not until he dared the prophets of Baal to a sacrifice contest. You remember what he did. He let them go first. And so they prayed and danced and wailed but the sacrifice remained untouched. Elijah was not impressed. "Shout louder!...Surely he is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or traveling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened." [1 Kings 18:27] Upon the failure of the prophets of Baal he said, "Come here to me." When that altar was prepared he ordered them to pour four jars of water all over it, not once, but three times. When Elijah called upon the LORD, a huge fire came down from the heavens. And among the blaze and the steam and the intense heat that sacrifice was accepted. Elijah was a man of action.

Wow! That's what we need! That's what I need! The spectacular! Fathers are usually known for the spectacular. Dad's almost always go for the dramatic. "Wait til your father gets home!" I am a father, grandfather, and I want the spectacular. When my kids go astray I want them to straighten up..now. When my granddaughter had that hole in her heart you better believe I expected the spectacular and I got it, through the mirracle of medicine at Duke hospital. Now the only evidence that anything was wrong with her at all is the scar in the middle of her chest that will eventually be overwhelmed by the her own healthy growth. That's what we want in life. We want the spectacular. We want healing of our diseases. We want the economy to rebound with a healthy housing market and low borrowing rates and high savings rates. We wanted that top kill in the Gulf to work. We want war to cease.

Otherwise sometimes it gets too much for us

But I don't get it all the time. When I don't, I don't like it very much. I don't like it because I have to struggle with the reality of unfulfilled expectations and bitter disappointment.

Besides that, the spectacular doesn't last. At least that's the way it was with Elijah. It even got too much for him. Even he got depressed. The spectacular didn't last. The real test for Elijah's faith was not so much his trust that God would bring the storm to defeat the prophets of Baal. The real test for Elijah's faith was whether God is in the calm after the storm. When the spectacular, when it comes, is over, when you realize that most answers to prayer are not quite so spectacular, maybe even unfulfilled and disappointing, is God in the calm after the storm?

This text begs the question for us this morning: Is the spectacular, is the fulfillment of our exact expectations the way we want it when we want it our only option in our life of faith? Is this our only option in our life of faith? We long for the spectacular and rejoice when it happens now and then but fall disappointed, disillusioned and depressed when it doesn't.

This is where the text is very clear. The wind blew full force through that valley, but God was not in the wind. An earthquake shook that entire landscape, but God was not in the earthquake. Fire came down from the heavens again, but God was not in the fire.

In the depth of despair when expectations of the spectacular are dashed, that's when the sound of sheer silence, the sound of fine silence, that still small voice, makes all the difference. Even in disillusionment God still calls.

And we need to listen. Dale Allison, in his book *The Luminous Dusk* (Grand Rapids, MI; Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006, p 35) "...all religions advise that faith without quiet is dead...the idea that God is not in wind etc is general religious wisdom." That's why folks go to the desert hermitage. That's why the Scripture tells us to "be still and know that I am God." It is in stillness that God does God's best work. "God's 'voice' may be present amid God's silence as in the birth of a child to an unwed mother amid scandalous circumstances or in the death of an innocent man on (a)

CROSS.” (Seow, Choon-Leong, *New Interpreters' Bible* [Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999] III, p. 145 “First and Second Books of Kings”)

When Elijah listened he found his strength. He could hear God giving him what he needed to face the future that would otherwise be too much for him. He could trust that God will work it out in the end, in this case through the passing of his mantle to Elisha by whose leadership the threat is ended.

The problem is it's easy to believe in a God of the spectacular. It's a lot easier to follow a God of the spectacular.

What's hard is entrusting your life to God not knowing whether God will do the spectacular or not. What's hard is trusting that God will secure us no matter what. Now you better believe that I believe in the spectacular of medicine, but it was not all that easy to release my little Tori to the hand of that surgeon last April.

It seems to me we need to pray for the gift of stillness, quietness, and trust just as much, just as fervently, just as eagerly, as we pray for the spectacular. We need to have in us the faith the Psalmist describes: “By day the LORD commands his steadfast love, and at night his song is with me.” (Ps 42:9)

The Scripture says, “Be still and know that I am God.” That's what knowing that the LORD is God is all about.

Stillness, listening, trust. It has been said that children learn more in their first year of life than perhaps at any other time in their lifetime (Allison, 42). The first year of life when the human being is essentially still, trusting, open, silent (even those piercing cries in the night come from the depths of helplessness and trust).

We fathers need to heed the words of Jesus and be just like little children. We all need to listen, to trust this God upon whom we depend. Children of God, isn't that what we have to do—entrust our lives, our world, to God? Otherwise, it really is too much for us.

The calm after the storm. It is in the stillness that God does God's best work.

William G. Davidson