

1 King 19:1-15a

“I alone am left”



There is a story about a truck driver who was going through a town on the truck route. There were a number of stop signs and at each one, the man got out, banged on the side of the truck with a baseball bat, got back in, and drove off to the next stop sign. Finally, someone asked him why this rather strange behaviour. He explained: “I have a two-ton truck and four tons of canaries aboard. I have to keep two tons of canaries in the air at all times.”

Our lives are too often overloaded, with double the weight in scheduling, in anxiety. And sometimes our “solution” is like the man with the bat – to rearrange the load. Perhaps it would be better to take stock, face reality and lighten the load.

But how?

Another story, this one out of a prayer meeting. Apparently, in this particular prayer circle, one man frequently prayed, “O God, clean out the cobwebs from my mind.” One night, a woman followed up on the man’s prayer with: “O God, don’t clean out the cobwebs. Kill the spider!!”

Forget the symptoms! Tackle the problem at the source!

But how?

As ancient as the stories in the Bible are, there are insights to be gained that are still applicable today.

There’s the story of Elijah. I commend chapter 18 to you, for this week’s reading -- as a fuller backdrop for this morning’s snippet. In brief, Elijah comes to the people of Israel and calls them to make a decision, between God and Baal. Then he challenges the 450 prophets of Baal to a contest of sorts and singlehandedly defeats them. And then every one of those prophets is destroyed!! As a result of their contest and Elijah’s triumph, God sends promised rain to a drought inflicted Israel, and Elijah does a victory lap, running ahead of the chariot of Israel’s king Ahab all the way to the royal palace in Jezreel, to Ahab’s wife, Queen Jezebel, a worshipper of Baal.. There in Jezreel, Ahab tells his wife what has transpired and in a great fury, she confronts Elijah. “So may the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life like the life of one of them (the Baal prophets Elijah killed) by this time tomorrow.” [1 Kings 19:2b]

The story tells us that Elijah’s victory lap turns into running for his life. He leaves his servant in Beer-sheba and continues the flight of a fugitive. At the end of a day’s journey, Elijah lies down under a broom tree and asks God to let him die. It’s too much for him to try to keep half the birds in the air at all times. He feels utterly alone. This one, who is known in our faith history, through our Biblical memory as one of the greatest of the prophets, is beyond being overwhelmed. Filled with a sense that there is no one who understands him, his faith, his message, his vision, Elijah longs to quit, aches to die.

As you enter into Elijah’s story, do you see the constants in his life?

One, he talks to God. He puts everything he is feeling out there for God to hear and see – all the raw, un-pretty, desperate, despairing stuff that he is feeling.

Secondly, he waits for God, listens to God, responds to God’s leading, obeys God’s

direction. When Elijah tries to quit, God doesn't. Even though Elijah doesn't really know what it is that he needs, God provides exactly what he needs – food, water, rest, time. Even though Elijah has no idea where to turn or what to do or where to go next, God guides, leads. When Elijah is nourished and has rested, God gives him strength, and a new purpose and vision. God shows God's self to Elijah, opening the conversation with a question – “What are you doing here, Elijah?” Then, God gives him a mission, direction. “Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus ...” Here, God is telling Elijah that his life isn't over, that he has things to do yet. And then there's the promise, “And I will be with you through it all.”

Like Elijah, our lives can become overloaded, with double the weight that we can bear, alone. We, like Elijah, may sink into darkness, become enveloped in a suffocating cloud of despair. Rearranging the load just doesn't do it any longer.

Marty Robbins wrote it and most of us are familiar with Elvis Presley singing it:

But this time you gave me a mountain

A mountain I may never climb

It isn't a hill any longer

You gave me a mountain this time.

Rearranging the load just doesn't do it any longer. But what else is there?

We can take a page from Elijah's life and talk with God – lay everything we feel before our creator, our Saviour – everything. We can wait for God, and listen for him. We can take him at his word and expect him to hear us, be with us. We can trust that what we need, God will provide. We can be open and watch for God's presence in our lives – be it in the wind or the earthquake or the fire or in the sound of sheer silence. God may send someone to journey with us, to care for us. Or he may nudge us to try a new direction, one that will bring us to someone or something that we need. Somehow, God will send the stuff we need, the water and bread that will strengthen us for the journey into the rest of our lives.

Rearrange the load? Why, when we can take that load to God?

There are many, many more stories – ancient stories in the Bible, and contemporary stories from companions lives ... stories that show us how God forever journeys with us, that God longs to heal our brokenness, comfort our wounded spirits, bring light and hope into our darkest nights – too many stories for just one sermon.

Let me simply remind us all of the strength and power that is available to us through the Spirit's presence as we come to our Lord's table. The gospel this morning shows us the power of God's Son, power that is available for our lives; power to tackle an entire legion of demons and cast them out; power to overcome everything that is beyond us; power to defeat anything that might hurt, break, or threaten to destroy us.