

1 Kings 19:1,4-16

Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a solitary broom tree. He asked that he might die: "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my ancestors." Then he lay down under the broom tree and fell asleep. Suddenly an angel touched him and said to him, "Get up and eat." He looked, and there at his head was a cake baked on hot stones, and a jar of water. He ate and drank, and lay down again. The angel of the Lord came a second time, touched him, and said, "Get up and eat, otherwise the journey will be too much for you." He got up, and ate and drank; then he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God.

At that place he came to a cave, and spent the night there. Then the word of the Lord came to him, saying, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" He answered, "I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away." He said, "Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by."

Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave.

Then there came a voice to him that said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" He answered, "I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away."

Then the Lord said to him, "Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus; when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael as king over Aram. Also you shall anoint Jehu son of Nimshi as king over Israel; and you shall anoint Elisha son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah as prophet in your place.

Acts 9:1-6,8-12,17-21a,22

Meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" He asked, "Who are you, Lord?" The reply came, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do."

Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. For three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, “Ananias.” He answered, “Here I am, Lord.” The Lord said to him, “Get up and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul. At this moment he is praying, and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight.”

So Ananias went and entered the house. He laid his hands on Saul and said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored.

Then he got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength. For several days he was with the disciples in Damascus, and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, “He is the Son of God.”

All who heard him were amazed. Saul became increasingly more powerful and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Messiah.

One of the topics you hear the most disagreement about in Christian communities, is the call of God. Who is called? How are people called? What is a specific person called to do? Is call something you do once, and you’re done?

Our Scripture readings today tell the stories of two very different calls. The Gospel reading is the familiar call of Saul, or Paul. The Old Testament reading is somewhat less familiar: it is a subsequent call of the prophet Elijah.

Let me put our Old Testament story in context. Elijah is a prophet of the LORD, one of the most powerful prophets there has ever been. He has preached the word of God. He has brought rain to end a drought. He has even raised the dead. He has called down fire from Heaven and burned water-soaked meat to a crisp while four hundred and fifty priests of the idol Baal tried in vain to do the same thing. He then got the people of Israel to follow him and kill all four hundred and fifty of these false priests.¹ You could look it up.

But now Queen Jezebel, who had brought the worship of Baal to the people of Israel, is very angry with Elijah. She wants him dead, and she is sending people to kill him. So, Elijah has

¹ 1 Kings 17-18.

run away and hidden in the wilderness. He tells God that he is done. He asks God to take him now, and he lies down under a tree and goes to sleep.

God does not accept Elijah's plan. You see, God is not done with Elijah yet.

An angel wakes Elijah up with food and water, twice, and the angel sends him to Mount Horeb, the place where prophets before him have been called. At the mountain, he finds a cave. There the LORD asks him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" Elijah gives God a sob story about how bad everything is, and how he alone is left faithful to the Lord.

God listens to this story, and tells Elijah, "Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by."

There is a great wind, so strong that it's bringing down pieces of the mountain. Now, wind is one of the ways in which the Holy Spirit has manifested. One of the names for the Spirit is the *ruach Elohim*, the breath of God that God breathed into Adam to turn inanimate dirt into a human being. But Elijah sees that God is not in the wind, and he does not go out.

There is a great earthquake, and, after the earthquake, a fire, but God is not in the earthquake or the fire. Elijah stays in his cave.

After these things, there is a great silence, and God is in the silence. Elijah goes out to the mouth of the cave. The Lord says to him again, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" Elijah tells God the same story he had before, word for word.

Elijah is a worthy prophet. He has, indeed, done all that God called him to do.

But God is not done with Elijah yet.

God gives Elijah a new call. Like a football coach swatting his star quarterback on the butt and sending him back onto the field, God sends Elijah back out into the world.

God tells Elijah to anoint new kings for two different nations, and to anoint a successor for himself. God sees that Elijah's done a good job, but somebody needs to keep doing that job, giving the people of Israel course corrections to send them back to the way that God intends for them.

Our New Testament reading is the call of Saul on the Damascus road. Saul believes that he has already been called by God to defend the faith against the followers of this man named Jesus. He is arresting Christians and having them killed. He's travelling to Damascus to do more of this, when he is given a vision of Jesus and then struck blind.

For three days, he is forced to stop what he is doing. He is forced to be still, and to listen.

A Christian in Damascus named Ananias hears God's call, and goes to Saul. He lays hands on him and Saul is healed. Ananias and the other Damascus Christians baptize Saul, and teach him what it is to be a Christian.

Saul has done evil. He held the coats of the mob who murdered Stephen. He has sought out Christians, arresting them so that they can be killed.

But God is not done with Saul yet.

Saul becomes one of the foremost spreaders of God's word. More of the New Testament is written by him or in his name than by anyone else. He founds churches all over Greece and Turkey, and even helps strengthen the church in Rome.

God was not done with Elijah. God had a new call for Elijah, but Elijah was terribly busy. He had to stop what he was doing and be still long enough to hear it. God got Elijah to stop, and

gave him his new call. Elijah went on to fulfill that call, and make a difference for God in the world.

God was not done with Saul. God had a new call for Saul, but Saul was terribly busy. He had to stop what he was doing and be still long enough to hear it. God forced Saul to stop, and gave him his new call. Saul went on to fulfill that call, and make a difference in the world.

So, what does this mean for us, terribly busy ordinary people in America in 2017?

God has called you. The Holy Spirit acted in your baptism, calling you to love God and your neighbors, to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God.

Some of you have done amazing things. Helped win wars. Brought food to the hungry and clothes to the naked. Helped to found a congregation of God's church where there wasn't one. Raised children, yours and other people's, to love others and to act on that love. Cared for people whom others ignored. These are great things, and worthy of respect.

But God is not done with you yet.

God knows you better than you know yourself. And God loves you.

Stop and think about that a minute.

God knows you better than you know yourself. God knows everything you've ever said and done. Even those things that no one else knows.

God knows all those thoughts you think, but that you would never say. God knows what you've been tempted to say and to do, and just how close you have come to saying and doing those things. And God loves you anyway.

Slow down and think about that.

God knows you better than you know yourself. God knows what you can do and what you can't, better than you do. God is not done with you yet. This God who loves you like that has something more for you to do. It may be to do more of the same thing that you have been doing. It may not. It may be to do something else entirely.

But, in order to hear it, you need to slow down.

Be still.

As the psalmist said, "Be still, and know that I am God."

This next week, try it. Take some time. Go somewhere by yourself. Turn off the television, and the radio. Don't try to **do** anything. Just **be** with God.

You may find that you hear God's call.

You may find that God is calling you to do something. To stand up. To show the world what loving God and loving your neighbor look like in specific ways.

But the first step is to be still. And know that God is God.

Amen.