

I.N.I.

4th Sunday after Pentecost
June 24, 2012
I Kings 19:1-8

In Christ Jesus, who sympathizes with our weaknesses, for He was tempted in every way, just as we are, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

There is a remarkable statement in the book of James. It is found in chapter 5:17. It reads, **ELIJAH WAS A MAN JUST LIKE US...** I don't know about you, but I don't place myself in the same category as Elijah. He proclaimed a drought which lasted 3 ½ years, he ended the drought with prayer, he raised the dead, he challenged the 400 prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel and through prayer brought down fire from heaven. He was bodily taken to heaven in a whirlwind and chariot of fire. **JUST LIKE US?** I don't think so. Elijah was one of the greatest prophets in the Old Testament. He was fearless and bold. **JUST LIKE US? YES!**

What made the great men and women of the Old Testament great? What made them heroes of faith? Great men of God were great because of God--great women of God were great because of God. We need to remember that the prophets, people, apostles of the Old and New Testaments were real people. They were not some super human beings. They were real people, **JUST LIKE US**, or as another translation has it, **WITH A NATURE LIKE OURS**. They were human just like us, chosen by God to be His children, chosen and called to do His will in proclaiming His word.

And that is one of the marvels of the Bible. It shows God's people as they really were. Sins and all! It does so, so that we would not glorify the person, so that we would not praise and honor and worship the individual; but glorify God. In our sermon text this morning we see the very real, human reaction of the prophet Elijah.

Our text takes place immediately after Elijah's triumph on Mt. Carmel as we read. What a stirring, emotionally charged and exciting day that must have been. In his joy and excitement over the great act of God of sending fire down from heaven, we are told **THE HAND OF THE LORD CAME UPON ELIJAH; AND TUCKING HIS CLOAK INTO HIS BELT, HE RAN AHEAD OF AHAB ALL THE WAY TO JEZREEL**, and Ahab was riding in a chariot! Elijah was pumped! The greatest moment in his ministry had just occurred. He literally was **FLYING HIGH!** What a contrast to the next day, when he hit **ROCK BOTTOM**.

All of Elijah's dreams seemed to collapse. The man of courage who had just stood before 400 priests of Baal and wicked King Ahab now found himself running away, fearing for his life. What had happened? The prophets of Baal were defeated and killed. God had provided a double miracle; the all-consuming fire from heaven and the rain to end a 3 ½ year drought. Both had come through Elijah's prayers. No doubt Elijah assumed that Baal worship would now come to an end, expecting that King Ahab, who had agreed to this challenge to prove who the true God in Israel was, would take the lead in riding the land of idolatry and immorality and bring the people back to the true worship of the LORD Jehovah.

No doubt Elijah thought his days of being under a cross of trial and tribulation, an outlaw on the run for all of these years had now come to an end. Perhaps he even thought he would be a national hero. But any such hopes and thoughts were quickly shattered. There was no genuine repentance on the part of Ahab, just a numbing and stunning awe at what he had witnessed. When Ahab told Jezebel, his wife, what had happened she flew into a rage and promised to kill Elijah by the next evening, even as he had killed her prophets of Baal. Instead of praise and thanksgiving, Elijah

received death threats and curses.

The joy filled, victorious prophet was completely deflated. He thought his cause was lost for good. God's enemies seemed to be in complete control and Elijah felt that he was the only one left who served God. He was very depressed.

Have you ever felt that way? That's really a foolish question. Are you human? Then you've felt that way. No doubt most all of us have at one time or another had the feeling that everything we have tried to do has been useless, has failed. The harder you try the behinder you get. The more effort you put in the harder the task becomes and you feel there is no one else there to help. Perhaps it is all of the family burdens, cares and responsibilities that you are carrying on your heart. Perhaps it is the heavy work load, the many hours and the mental strain of your job that is weighing you down. Maybe it is all of the bills that are piling up or you just don't feel like you're appreciated by your boss, by your children, by your spouse. Maybe it is the constant fighting and bickering that is taking place in your home and you have tried and tried to keep things together and they seem to be unraveling faster than you can keep up. Maybe it is all of these things combined

Elijah's feeling is much like the one a pastor has when after a week of calls on delinquent members, and after many promises of "I'll be there next Sunday," nothing happens, no one shows up---the feeling when after hours of counseling with God's Word there is no change in the heart of the counselee, or the counselee listens but doesn't put anything he has heard into practice and goes his own way in the same miserable situation. Perhaps it is like the feeling the pastor gets when a member leaves the church and he is blamed or when he has tried to be faithful in his use of his time and he is accused of not visiting enough, or not doing enough. You know the feeling. It is a mixture of depression and self-pity.

All of these feelings we have felt. But you know that there is something worse that faces both me as pastor as well as all of you. It is the realization that we so often do fail to serve the Lord God as He deserves to be served in our callings, in our family relationships, in our jobs. From this knowledge comes a guilt which can quickly lead to despair, a guilt which works against **FAITH, HOPE AND LOVE!**

Elijah threw himself down under the broom tree and wanted to die. Every fiber of his being had given up and he didn't want to live any longer. To him it seemed as though there was no reason to go on. He said, **IT IS ENOUGH! NOW, LORD, TAKE MY LIFE, FOR I AM NO BETTER THAN MY FATHERS!**

What led Elijah to such a confession? Was it a result of the fear he felt because of the threat upon his life? Was it guilt he felt because he had run away and failed to oppose godlessness by standing up for the LORD? Was it his feeling of failure to destroy the Baal cult, something he had thought he had done? Was it an overwhelming sense of his own frailty, sin, weakness and inadequacy? Was it because this wasn't the way he had planned it should turn out?

It was probably all of those things and maybe even more. Elijah was feeling what other men of God have felt when confronted with their own human frailties. A humble admission like the publican and like the Apostle Paul who said of himself, **I AM THE LEAST OF THE APOSTLES AND DO NOT EVEN DESERVE TO BE CALLED AN APOSTLE**, and again who said, **THIS IS A FAITHFUL SAYING AND WORTHY OF ALL ACCEPTANCE, THAT CHRIST JESUS CAME INTO THE WORLD TO SAVE SINNERS, OF WHOM I AM CHIEF.**

But the reality of his sins and weaknesses was not a reason for Elijah to give up. In fact it is precisely when we realize that we have failed and are inadequate on our own that we can receive God's power and strength. The same Apostle Paul wrote, **FOR WHEN I AM WEAK, THEN I AM STRONG!** Elijah needed to learn that lesson!

Suddenly an angel woke him from his sleep and there was a cake of bread baked on some coals. This Elijah ate. A little while later he again ate and drank for the angel said, **THE JOURNEY IS TOO GREAT FOR YOU.** With that miraculous food, Elijah traveled for forty days and nights till he came to Mt. Horeb which is the area of Mt. Sinai.

What a tremendous text this is for anyone who has felt the frustration, discouragement, despair, fear, sense of sin and guilt, inadequacies and yes, self-pity that Elijah did.

LET THE LORD BE YOUR STRENGTH IN DAYS OF DISCOURAGEMENT!

1) REALIZE THAT DEPRESSION CAN AFFLICT US ALL.

Just because we are Christians does not mean we will never be depressed. We are also very human. Our sinful, human nature which is so strong in everyone of us, takes over our feelings, changes our emotions sometimes even against our own will. Elijah was a man **JUST LIKE US, WITH A NATURE LIKE OURS.** His experiences, both good and bad, were not so different from ours. We are reminded that our failures, whether they come about because of lofty expectations, frustration, fear, self-righteous pride, self-pity or whatever neither disqualify nor excuse us from service to our God. Instead they serve a good purpose in reminding us of our sins and of our total dependence upon God the Holy Spirit for help. **WHERE DOES MY HELP COME FROM?** the Psalmist asks and he answers his own question, **MY HELP COMES FROM THE LORD, WHO MADE HEAVEN AND EARTH.**

Yes, Elijah was afraid, defeated, burned out, ready to give up. He was at a point where many children of God find themselves at one time or another. Martin Luther suffered many severe bouts of depression.

2) BE AWARE OF THE LORD'S FORGIVING AND SUSTAINING PRESENCE

Elijah was given miracle food and by God's grace was sustained for a forty day journey in the wilderness. Later he was taught the lesson of the **STILL, SMALL VOICE!** That is not the thundering of the Law, the condemning judgments of God that changes hearts and draws people to really know the LORD. No, it is through the gentle message of the Gospel, the Good News of Jesus that hearts are touched and emotional and spiritual healing is given. It is the Gospel, the Good News of God's love in His Son Jesus, the message of a Savior who has been through it all for us, who has already experienced loneliness, frustration, persecution, threats on his life, rejection, lack of appreciation---yet without sin---that affects our hearts and lives and gives faith and courage to us timid people. Jesus knows how we feel in these times and with His presence, with His powerful Word which we spiritually digest, He strengthens us.

Yes, Martin Luther did suffer severe bouts of depression at times, but he also did a great amount of work: sermon writing, preaching, teaching, hymn composing, translating, counseling, writing commentaries. Luther spent time in prayer and in study of the Word. We cannot look within, to internal sources for help. There is an old saying that has a lot of truth to it: **WHEN GOD LETS US STUMBLE, HE DOES SO, SO THAT WE MAY FALL INTO HIS LOVING ARMS.** When He lets us fail as His servants, He does so, so that we might lose faith in ourselves, in our own strength and abilities and use His instead. It is not scriptural that God helps those who help themselves. The truth is that God helps those who realize that they cannot help themselves. Often He lets us see that help in His Word only after He lets us know in no uncertain terms that we cannot help ourselves.

Finally we see from our text

3) DO WHATEVER THE LORD GIVES YOU TO DO IN HIS STRENGTH

Our callings all are different. The Lord has laid upon each of us differing responsibilities, cares and chores. We have different jobs, different family relationships, different pressures. Whatever they are, the Lord has called us to do what we can do in His strength, not our own. We can face

insurmountable odds; like Gideon and his 300 men against a 135,000 Midian soldiers; or like David, a mere youth against the giant Goliath.

We can bear up under tremendous pressure and emotional strain; like Jeremiah and Daniel and his three friends, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.

We can stand in the face of crippling trials and temptations; like Abraham--who was ready and willing to sacrifice his son, Isaac and Stephen who preached about Jesus even though he was being stoned to death.

And we can be victorious in our battles against this sinful world, Satan and our own sinful flesh, through Jesus who conquered them all with His own death and resurrection.

We remain joyful, confident and courageous in this vale of tears, **ALONE THROUGH CHRIST AND HIS WORD!**

Paul who said he did not deserve to be called an Apostle, who said that he was the chief of all sinners, who admitted to his weakness, also declared: **I CAN DO ALL THINGS THROUGH CHRIST WHO STRENGTHENS ME!** Christ who strengthens me through the power of His death and resurrection, through the power of His forgiving Word.

One last point. Elijah had his glorious moment on Mt. Carmel, but in all reality it was God's glorious moment, not Elijah's. Perhaps Elijah had to learn this truth more clearly. Perhaps we too need to remember that **IT IS GOD WHO WORKS IN US BOTH TO WILL AND TO DO OF HIS GOOD PLEASURE.**

It is God's work that we do and it is God's strength that gives us the ability to do His work and it is to God's glory that we do it.

LET THE LORD BE YOUR STRENGTH IN DAYS OF DISCOURAGEMENT AND IN ALL YOUR DAYS. To our Triune God be **ALL GLORY AND PRAISE.**

Amen.