

I.N.I.

Sixth Sunday in Pentecost
July 16, 2017
I Kings 19:14-21

In Christ Jesus, our ever living Lord and Savior, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Three weeks ago we heard of the prophet Elijah being at a very low point in his ministry. He was a fugitive being chased by King Ahab throughout Israel and to top it off there was a three year drought. But the LORD provided for him. Remember how? With the water from the brook Kidron and ravens coming with meat in their beaks to feed him. But eventually the brook dried up and the birds stopped coming. Again the LORD provided this time with a destitute widow of Zaraphath whose oil and flour never ran out.

But soon Elijah hit another low point when the widow's son suddenly became ill and died. Yet again the LORD came through answering Elijah's prayer and gave life back to the boy so that this widow had her son back again.

Then at the end of the three years of drought came the confrontation on Mt. Carmel. Baal's prophets cried and yelled, ran around in circles in a frenzy and cut themselves till their blood flowed to get their god to answer them with fire. Nothing happened. Elijah offered a brief prayer to the LORD JEHOVAH and fire came shooting down from heaven licking up the water and burning everything on the altar. The contest between Elijah and the prophets of Baal resulted in a resounding victory for the LORD and a clear endorsement of Elijah as His true prophet. The people responded by falling to the ground and crying out: **THE LORD, HE IS GOD! THE LORD, HE IS GOD!** Elijah's ministry was at a high point, perhaps the highest.

But no sooner were the prophets of Baal killed than Queen Jezebel threatened Elijah, **SO LET THE GODS DO TO ME, AND MORE ALSO, IF I DO NOT MAKE YOUR LIFE AS THE LIFE OF ONE OF THEM BY TOMORROW ABOUT THIS TIME.** Nothing seemed to have changed. Elijah ran for his life. We are not told of anyone standing up for him or defending him against the wicked Queen.

Elijah flees into the wilderness and prayed that he might die. He said, **IT IS ENOUGH! NOW, LORD, TAKE MY LIFE, FOR I AM NO BETTER THAN MY FATHERS!** The LORD sent an angel with food and water to strengthen Elijah and he traveled 40 days and 40 nights to Mt. Horeb where the LORD appeared to Him. This brings us to our text and from the first verse we see that Elijah is at the lowest point in his ministry.

In vs. 13 the LORD asks, **WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE, ELIJAH?** Elijah replies, **I HAVE BEEN VERY ZEALOUS FOR THE LORD GOD OF HOSTS; BECAUSE THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL HAVE FORSAKEN YOUR COVENANT, TORN DOWN YOUR ALTARS, AND KILLED YOUR PROPHETS WITH THE SWORD. I ALONE AM LEFT; AND THEY SEEK TO TAKE MY LIFE.** Pretty despairing situation! It seems to Elijah that all of his work has been useless and that he is the only true worshipper of the LORD left in the land. This is not an uncommon feeling in the church today. To Christians in general and called workers in particular, it often seems as if their labor has produced no results. As a Christian friend, you may counsel your fellow workers or neighbors with God's Word and they reject all your counsel and nothing changes. As a Christian pastor, we may counsel, teach, advise, encourage and admonish with the Word and very often what do we see, nothing, no results. Like Elijah, we are in need of continual assurance that our **"LABOR IN THE LORD IS NOT IN VAIN."**

But these words also indicate a sinful dissatisfaction with God's governing of the world. In a way, Elijah was doing what Adam did after his fall into sin, blaming God. "Why isn't it the way I want it to be?" We struggle with the same sinful dissatisfaction and feelings of hopelessness as Elijah. Pastor and people alike. So what is the Lord's answer to us---

WHEN EVERYTHING SEEMS HOPELESS?

Our first point tells us the Lord assures us

I: I WILL EXECUTE MY JUSTICE!

We read vs. 15-17 **THEN THE LORD SAID TO HIM: GO, RETURN ON YOUR WAY**

TO THE WILDERNESS OF DAMASCUS; AND WHEN YOU ARRIVE, ANOINT HAZAEL AS KING OVER SYRIA. ALSO YOU SHALL ANOINT JEHU THE SON OF NIMSHI AS KING OVER ISRAEL. AND ELISHA THE SON OF SHAPHAT OF ABEL MEHOLAH YOU SHALL ANOINT AS PROPHET IN YOUR PLACE. IT SHALL BE THAT WHOEVER ESCAPES THE SWORD OF HAZAEL, JEHU WILL KILL; AND WHOEVER ESCAPES FROM THE SWORD OF JEHU, ELISHA WILL KILL.

What does all of this mean? These commands given to Elijah are showing him that God is in control. He anoints kings and disposes of them. He brings about His justice at His time and in His way. Divine judgment would come upon the Northern Kingdom of Israel for their wickedness and immorality. If you read the first few chapters of II Kings you will see how God carried this out. Hazael, the one Elijah anointed as king over Syria, was a ruthless individual who slaughtered many in Israel, burning their strongholds, killing their young men with the sword, dashing their children to the ground and even killing their pregnant women. When Jehu became King of Israel he murdered the entire family of wicked King Ahab, as God had prophesied. He slaughtered all of the prophets of Baal that were left and he commanded that Queen Jezebel be thrown to her death from a second story window. God's justice is not always swift, but it is inescapable.

Because of our own sinful despair and self-pitying view of life, we need to be reassured over and over again that the Lord's governing of this world is truly good and just. He promises us, **THAT ALL THINGS WORK TOGETHER FOR GOOD TO THEM THAT LOVE GOD.** He also says, **VENGEANCE IS MINE. I WILL REPAY!** But it will be in His own time and in His own way. Therefore the **LORD'S ASSURANCE WHEN EVERYTHING SEEMS HOPELESS** is

I WILL EXECUTE MY JUSTICE.

If not here in time, for sure in eternity.

Secondly we see God assures us

II: I WILL WORK THROUGH MY WORD.

We read vs. 18 **YET I HAVE RESERVED SEVEN THOUSAND IN ISRAEL, ALL WHOSE KNEES HAVE NOT BOWED TO BAAL, AND EVERY MOUTH THAT HAS NOT KISSED HIM.** Was Elijah **THE ONLY ONE LEFT IN ISRAEL** who trusted in the LORD Jehovah? The LORD somewhat chides Elijah for his lack of confidence in the Word he was called to proclaim. At the very least there was Obadiah, the king's own servant who professed his faith in the LORD to Elijah and the 100 prophets that Obadiah had secretly hidden from Jezebel. In fact, there were much more than 100, the LORD says there are 7,000 in Israel, more believers in Israel than Elijah knew. The LORD is showing to Elijah that his work in the kingdom may not be evident to the eye (for we can't see into the heart), but his work had been far more effective than Elijah could ever have imagined.

This statement of God is an important reminder for us as members of this small, confessional church body called the CLC-Church of the Lutheran Confession. For two reasons. God knows how many He has as His children. Numbers should not mean that much to us. Simply preach and teach the Word of God. Proclaim the Law that **ALL HAVE SINNED AND FALL SHORT OF THE GLORY OF GOD...THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, NO, NOT ONE...THE WAGES OF SIN IS DEATH.** Proclaim the Gospel that **GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD THAT HE GAVE HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON THAT WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM SHOULD NOT PERISH BUT HAVE EVERLASTING LIFE...CHRIST DIED FOR OUR SINS...GOD WAS IN CHRIST RECONCILING THE WORLD TO HIMSELF, NOT IMPUTING THEIR TRESPASSES TO THEM...FOR HE MADE HIM WHO KNEW NO SIN TO BE SIN FOR US, THAT WE MIGHT BECOME THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD IN HIM.**

Proclaim that Good News of our salvation alone through Jesus Christ and let the Holy Spirit do the work. So many churches have fallen for the Church Growth method of producing numerical results. But at what price? The price of the truth of the Scriptures. God says **I WILL WORK THROUGH MY WORD,** not through man inspired ideas or human gimmicks and He says, **MY WORD WILL NOT RETURN TO ME VOID, BUT IT SHALL ACCOMPLISH WHAT I PLEASE, AND IT SHALL PROSPER IN THE THING FOR WHICH I SENT IT.**

The second thing we learn from this is that in spite of the flood of false teachings that pollutes the churches of our day, the Holy Spirit is still about His work of calling people to faith and keeping

them in the faith by means of the Gospel. Do we sometimes feel like we are the only believers left in a godless society and immoral world? God has His called children scattered all over. The Holy Christian Church is alive and well. We should not despair.

Finally, the **LORD ASSURES US WHEN EVERYTHING SEEMS HOPELESS...**

III: I WILL PROVIDE FOR MY CHURCH.

We read vs. 19-21 **SO HE DEPARTED FROM THERE, AND FOUND ELISHA THE SON OF SHAPHAT, WHO WAS PLOWING WITH TWELVE YOKE OF OXEN BEFORE HIM, AND HE WAS WITH THE TWELFTH. THEN ELIJAH PASSED BY HIM AND THREW HIS MANTLE ON HIM. AND HE LEFT THE OXEN AND RAN AFTER ELIJAH, AND SAID, PLEASE LET ME KISS MY FATHER AND MY MOTHER, AND THEN I WILL FOLLOW YOU. AND HE SAID TO HIM, GO BACK AGAIN, FOR WHAT HAVE I DONE TO YOU? SO ELISHA TURNED BACK FROM HIM, AND TOOK A YOKE OF OXEN AND SLAUGHTERED THEM AND BOILED THEIR FLESH, USING THE OXEN'S EQUIPMENT, AND GAVE IT TO THE PEOPLE, AND THEY ATE. THEN HE AROSE AND FOLLOWED ELIJAH, AND SERVED HIM.**

The distinctive cloak of Elijah identified him as the LORD's prophet. By placing this cloak on Elisha, Elijah was indicating to Elisha that he was to succeed him as the LORD's prophet in Israel. We see that Elisha understood the meaning of this action for he asks to be able to say goodbye to his parents. As a farewell gesture he slaughters some of his oxen and gives the food to the people. He then joins Elijah as an apprentice or we could say vicar, on the job learning the prophetic ministry from Elijah.

What the LORD was doing here was answering Elijah's prayer. Remember he had said, **IT IS ENOUGH! LORD, TAKE MY LIFE...** By commanding Elijah to anoint a successor, the Lord was indicating that the ministry would continue after Elijah's departure. His ministry to the Lord would end but another's would continue. This demonstrates the LORD's care and provision for His church of believers. Although Elijah would no longer be the prophet in Israel, the LORD was seeing to it that there would be another to take Elijah's place and proclaim the Law and the Gospel as faithfully and powerfully as Elijah had.

The Lord does the same today. There are quite a few vacancies in our CLC pulpits and classrooms. Our former teacher Miss Abbas is leaving this week to fill one of those openings as second teacher at Gethsemane Lutheran in Spokane, WA. There are still several schools calling for teachers. More and more retirements are on the horizon for our pastors who are in their mid-to-late 60's and early 70's. When we get our state OK for our pre-school we will need a teacher. Is it time to despair? Is it time to throw in the towel and give up? We know the answer but sometimes we live as if we do not.

God provides! He provides the congregations with called pastors and teachers. They serve Him by serving His people. Not only does the Lord see to it that His Word is preserved, but He also sees to it that individual people are called to preach and to teach His Word in the public ministry of the church as He sees fit. The person proclaiming is not important, the message proclaimed is.

The problem Elijah had we also have. He despaired because of his fleshly view of God's governing of the world and a lack of confidence in the power of God's Word. When everything seems hopeless to us in our life due to disease, disaster, death or destruction, it very often appears that way because we don't see with eyes of faith that God is still in control. He is saying to us this morning, that when everything seems hopeless, **IT IS NOT!**

I WILL EXECUTE MY JUSTICE and bring My will to bear on all things so that **ALL THINGS DO WORK TOGETHER FOR GOOD TO THEM THAT LOVE ME!**

I WILL WORK THROUGH MY WORD to strengthen My children and always have some of My children on earth to help comfort and serve one another!

And **I WILL PROVIDE FOR MY CHURCH** by providing men and women for preaching and teaching and providing everything that My people need for their soul's welfare.

Praise the LORD that He is in control of all things that happen in this world, and in everyone of our individual lives.

Praise the LORD that He is working all things out for His own good and gracious purposes for the blessings of His children, and that His Word is powerful and effective even if sometimes we see

little or no external evidence of it.

Praise the LORD that He controlled history some 2,000 years ago in the sending of His Son to come into this world as a human being and live that perfect life of obedient love for us and die the death that paid in full all of our sins. For if ever there was a hopeless situation, it was the one that Adam and Eve faced after their fall into sin and that we face when we were born dead in sin. There was no way out, there was no hope. They and we were guilty as charged and deserved death and damnation in hell. But God came to the rescue and **EXECUTED HIS JUSTICE** by laying all of our sins upon His Son. God fulfilled His Word by sending His Son and condemning Him instead of us and raising Him back to life for our assurance of a resurrection to eternal life. And God still provides for His church with the Means of Grace; the Gospel in Word and Sacraments.

With the Lord God in control there is never, never a time when everything is hopeless!
Amen.