

**19<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time**  
**August 9, 2008**

Have you ever felt like there is no blueprint in life that tells us how to live? Life's questions are complicated. What prepares you to be parents? How do young adults choose their careers in life? How do you know when is the right time to retire? How do we face these questions and know that we are truly following God's plan for us?

If we have eyes to see and ears to listen, Elijah and Peter have profound lessons to teach us.

First, let's talk about Elijah. Our reading from the First Book of Kings leaves out some important facts which happened just prior to Elijah going to the mountain. Elijah had just publically embarrassed King Ahab and Queen Jezebel by rivaling their prophets of Baal. You may remember the story, the prophets of Baal and Elijah each had a bull to sacrifice. The prophets danced and sang, prayed and called louder and louder to Baal, yet the bull remained on the altar. Elijah dug a moat around the stones where his bull was to be sacrificed. He had water poured over the sacrifice three times and when he called out to God, the holocaust, wood, stones and water in the trench were consumed. On that day the Glory of God was revealed.

Ahab and Jezebel were raging with anger at Elijah. They were dead set to kill him. The reading begins with Elijah running away to the desert for 40 days and nights. He knew that Jezebel was out to kill him. Elijah had given up hope. He was holding his own pity party in the desert, lamenting about how hard he had worked and all he had done, to be facing his death at the hands of Jezebel. Elijah lay down in the desert to die under the broom tree, but God sent an angel to Elijah who ordered him to get up and eat. He did so and Elijah went to Mt. Horeb.

On the mountain, he looked for God in the raging wind and in the earthquake and didn't find him. It was in the quiet gentle breeze that he encountered God.

When I look out and see your faces, I am humbled because so many of you have encountered the prophets of Baal in your own way and you have also gone to the mountain top to discover God's gentle presence in your lives.

I think of our senior members. Perhaps your prophets of Baal come from the TV commercials which scream out to us that youth is everything. Perhaps the moments came in your lives when you faced surgery, or when you watched as loved ones struggled with broken hips or heart conditions. We all have watched you come back after such experiences proclaiming the power of prayer; sharing how God sustained you when you were in the midst of crisis. Maybe Elijah's message is that God speaks to us in the crisis times of our lives, times that feel a lot like raging winds and earthquakes. God is also present in the tender moments when you surrender to the reality that you no longer can do what you did in your early days. I believe that Elijah's experience calls us to listen for God's call in the quiet moments of prayer.

God spoke to Elijah in the quiet recesses of his heart. God asked Elijah "Why have you taken the easy way out?" "Why had Elijah not relied on the presence of God to see him through difficulties? Why did he try to escape rather than speak the truth and trust that God would be with him?" God asks us the same questions. Christians don't run away to the desert to hide. We go the mountain for the wisdom to continue prophesying. It is our job to point the way to God as Elijah did.

The message of the Gospel is very clear! We have to get out of the Boat. Sometimes we would rather cling to the chaos. We hang onto the familiar, to the way we have always done things rather, than risk to trusting in God, trying something new and different.

Again, I am humbled by our assembly here today. Look at our youth, our young families, and our young single members. They get out of the boat...begin their education, the venture out into their chosen careers. Some become parents who love the next generation into life. Like Peter they step out of the boat. The comfort of mom and dad might lure them home for an occasional load of laundry or to seek advice, but they trust Jesus. Sometimes they walk on water or remember to reach out to Jesus when they begin to sink

Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his book *"The Cost of Discipleship"* wrote about Peter's experience of coming to know the power of God when he got out of the boat. Bonhoeffer tells us, "Peter had to leave the boat and risk his life on the sea, in order to learn both his own weakness and the almighty power of his Lord. If Peter had not taken the risk, he would never have learned the meaning of faith.

This truth resonates with all of us. We all know situations in our lives when we have been utterly powerless; situations when God has reached out and carried us through. And yes, we have probably lost our way like Elijah. We all have had times of wandering in the desert, when we have given up on God and ourselves.

Bonhoeffer tells us that before Peter can believe, he must experience the utterly impossible situation of walking on the waves of the raging sea. The road to faith passes through obedience to the call of Jesus. Unless a definite step is demanded,

the call vanishes into thin air, and if we imagine that we can follow Jesus without taking this step, we are deluding ourselves.

If we are alive and truly seeking God in our lives, we will find ourselves in the desert, and on the mountain top. We might very well be like the disciples who found themselves in the middle of the night in a boat being tossed back and forth in a raging sea. And then Jesus tells us, we have to get out of the boat, or that we can't lie down under the broom tree and give up.

We started this reflection by saying there is no blueprint detailing how we are to take our next step in life. Perhaps our assurance is that we have the stories of those who have gone before us. When Elijah felt overwhelmed he hid but he did go up the mountain. When Peter was sinking he was humble enough to reach out for help.

The stories of our ancestors offer us a fundamental option, we can run and hide under the broom tree, we can sink in the depths of the water or we can hold out our hand trusting in the abiding presence of our God.