

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

1 Kings 19:11-22

“What are you doing here?”

The LORD asked in verse 9, *“What are you doing here, Elijah?”* That’s rarely a comforting question. *“What are you doing here?”* rarely precedes good news. *“What are you doing here?”* usually means we should be somewhere else; it’s a question for the uninvited. *“What are you doing here, Elijah?”*

“I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.” Elijah had come for a pity party, but the LORD wasn’t serving sympathy that day.

In the Greek, Elijah says, *“I have been very jealous for the Lord God Almighty.”* I don’t know why the NIV didn’t translate it that way, because that word “jealous” is significant. It’s the very Hebrew word used by the LORD when He gave the First Commandment, *“You shall have no other God’s before me,”* and warned: *“For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.”*

This verse was the heart and core of Elijah’s ministry. In fact, Elijah’s very name means, *“The LORD is God.”* Elijah had preached countless sermons on this text, calling an idolatrous people back to the LORD, the one true God. Elijah had seen the LORD’s jealousy firsthand. He’d seen the LORD bring famine and drought upon the land. He’d seen Israel’s king lose his hold on his land and people. He’d right before this seen the LORD expose the false god Baal as a fraud on Mt. Carmel, even as that idol’s false prophets cut themselves and screamed out in desperation for their hunk of stone to act. He’d seen the LORD’s jealousy again and again. That word “jealous” had been seared into his mind, and so he says, *“I have been very jealous for the Lord God Almighty.”*

Elijah had been through a lot with the LORD, so why doesn’t God pat him on the back, call him a good boy, and grab some cheese to go with Elijah’s whine? After all, the LORD was the real

victim. The Israelites had really rejected the LORD when they persecuted His prophets. Why isn't the LORD all worked up like Elijah? Why isn't the LORD willing to throw in the towel as well?

The LORD doesn't need us to be jealous for Him. When a certain Samaritan village had rejected Jesus, the Apostles James and John asked, "*Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?*" Jesus rebuked them, "*You do not know what kind of spirit you are of, for the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them*" (Luke 9:54-56).

The LORD passes by Elijah in several ways. All, except for the last, are signs of judgment in the Old Testament: *wind, earthquake, and fire*. Elijah was ready to be done with Israel. He wanted the flock placed in his care to be judged. But God was not in the wind, the earthquake, or the fire. Like James and John, Elijah thought the LORD deserved better and wanted to see those sinners toasted as the LORD would later toast the king's soldiers who came to arrest Elijah. And the LORD did deserve better, but He is quite capable of making His own toast.

The LORD was in *the still small voice, the gentle whisper*. Elijah had forgotten his ordination vows. He was an Evangelical Lutheran preacher. He was not to preach the law as an end, but as a means to an end. The law must kill, but only so that the gospel can make alive. Elijah was never to pray judgment upon his people. No, convicting them was always to be as painful to him as it was to be to his people. As Dad would say before tanning your hide, "*This is going to hurt me more than it hurts you,*" so also the Lutheran preacher. The law kills not only the one hearing it, but the one proclaiming it as well, for both pastor and pew-sitter deserve the same thing according to the law: wind, earthquake, and fire; and every preaching of the law for the preacher is a reminder on his own unworthiness, a hard look in the mirror at his own ugly nature and staggered walk in Christ. When that ceases to be the case, he's traded his stoles for the Pharisee's wide phylacteries and long tassels.

The LORD was in *the still small voice, the gentle whisper*. And this was not the kind of whispering we use for secrets. This was the kind of whispering we use to share sweet-nothings, to offer comfort to those in need. This was the whispering of a son or daughter to the parent on the deathbed, the whisper of a mom or dad to the child in the dentist's chair. The LORD still had gospel, good news for Israel.

It is important that right after this the LORD sends Elijah, *“the LORD is God,”* to call Elisha, whose name means *“God is salvation.”* Elijah had declared who God is to the sinner. Elisha would declare what God does for the sinner. And that would be no piece of cake either, but as my favorite college professor would remind us when we whined about the workload, *“The ministry isn’t for wimps.”*

The LORD kept calling. Every remnant had a pastor. That remnant didn’t always grow, it was often persecuted, and the pastors often complained, but the LORD doesn’t need us to be jealous for Him; and, to be honest, our jealousy for Him is often a disguise for our own selfish desires. Jesus has taught us to pray, *“Thy kingdom come,”* and *“Thy will be done,”* not, *“Here’s how you do it, Lord.”*

The LORD kept calling, even as He took flesh and dwelt among us, and He hardly drafts from the All-Star Team. No, He chooses men that will leave little doubt that it is His Word and not their person that makes the difference. Nothing is more dangerous than a pastor that thinks he’s the secret to God’s success. God’s success is no secret: *Jesus Christ and Him crucified, from beginning to the end, Alpha to Omega.*

Today Jesus calls His first Apostles. The Ministry of the Word, also know as the Ministry, was to be these men’s vocation. They received a divine call, and so they left everything and followed Him, even as men do still today when they make themselves available for assignment from the seminary.

But Jesus does not call you to leave your nets. No, He calls you to stay with them, to serve Him by them. You are to remain in your vocation. His call to you is not to leave your calling, but to serve as a Christian in it. If you are a fisherman, fish for the Lord and your neighbor. Serve as salt and light in that boat, so that others may ask for the reason for the hope that you have, so that others may see your love and give glory to God; and know that the fruit of your labor tastes as sweet as honey to your Lord. Don’t for a moment think that standing in that fishing boat, whatever your fishing boat, or role in life, may be, as father and mother, son and daughter, accountant, line worker, and nurse, student and athlete, is any less important than me standing in this boat, this ark, and carrying out my vocation. Both are vital. Both are God’s will. Both are a

response to Jesus' call to follow. And both provide opportunities to give glory to the LORD God Almighty and draw others to Him. And when we become weary in that task, when we set the table for our pity party, we all, no matter what our vocations, find new life in the same place: *the still small voice, the gentle whisper*, who still speaks from the cross, *"It is finished,"* and outside the tomb, *"Be not afraid."*

"The LORD is God." *"God is salvation."* And the best part is that you are His. *"What are you doing here?"* In Christ, you're right where the LORD has placed you, so live in Him in that place to His glory and for the benefit of one another. Amen.