

Ps 42; 1 Ki 19:1-15a; Gal 3:23-29; Lu 8:26-39

The Bible history books tell the stories of the kings of Israel and Judah. When we read them, we hear an echo. Perhaps you have been reading straight through the Bible, perhaps not. I have read the Bible once a year since Hanna was a toddler. When you start reading at the beginning of the Bible, the stories are amazing. Creation! The saga of God forming a people for God's self. After all the great, ancient heroes – Noah, Abraham and his sons, Joseph, Moses, Joshua – we then settle into reading about the exploits of the kings – Saul, David and Solomon. When Solomon died, the nation split. Then, we follow the intertwined narratives of Israel and Judah.

Here is where it can become confusing, since the books of 1st and 2nd Kings tell the same story as the books of 1st and 2nd Chronicles. There is an echo, and as soon as you hear the story of all the kings – then you hear it again. The books of kings are written from the perspective of a prophet – some say Jeremiah, some say Isaiah. The chronicles are written from the perspective of a court historian or royal scribe. We find

throughout both histories, the long saga of corruption and failure to be faithful to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God's covenant with God's people is forgotten by those who inherit the power of the Israelite throne. They want to do things their own way – to find religions that tickle their fancy. God's Law is out of favor with kings who are listening to and following the ways of other nations and advisors who are worldly wise.

Today we have come to a tale of pagan influence that grew under the rule of King Ahab and his wife, Jezebel (daughter of the King of Sidon). The capital city of the Israelite empire was Samaria. Remains of shrines and temples to Baal and Asherah are found all over the hills of that city. Actually, all over what was Israel in the time of Ahab (9th c BC). The one true God was still worshiped when Solomon's son (Rehoboam) and the rebellious Jeroboam split the nation. King Ahab is the seventh generation after Jeroboam. Even though Baal worship became the official religion of the land of Israel, there were those who loved and worshiped Yahweh, the God of

Abraham. Ahab and Jezebel became the notorious pagan rulers God's people loved to hate. And the Lord brought in the holy nemesis of Ahab and Jezebel – the Prophet Elijah (1 Ki 17-2 Ki 2). Elijah was a mighty prophet. God used him to show glorious signs of God's power. Elijah troubled the godless kings of Israel, especially Ahab.

We catch up with Elijah right after he has had a showdown with the prophets of Baal. Fire from God came down and consumed the offering, the wood, the stones of the altar and all the gallons of water with which Elijah had saturated them. He then slaughtered all the priests of the pagan cult. Jezebel utters the threat we hear at the beginning of our Scripture passage for today. The queen fully intends to murder the Prophet Elijah.

Elijah is shaken to his core by the wickedness and malice of the royal house toward him and toward God. He flees to the wilderness outside Beersheba. He sits down under a broom tree and prays to God to end his life. He falls into a deep, restful sleep right there. An angel of the Lord

comes to him and commands him to sit up and eat. There is warm, fresh baked bread and fresh water. Elijah sleeps some more, is provided food once more and rises to travel to Mt. Horeb, also called Mt. Sinai. He sleeps in a cave. Finally, God meets the prophet on the mountain. And there, God gives Elijah the assurance he needs to persevere in proclaiming God's glory and God's Word.

First, there is a great wind that can shatter rock – but the Lord is not in the wind. Then, there is a great earthquake – but the Lord is not in the earthquake. Then, there is a great fire-storm – but the Lord is not in the fire. Finally, there is a sound of sheer silence (NRSV) or a gentle blowing (NASB) or a still small voice (KJV).

What does the sheer silence of God mean? In that profound quiet Elijah perceives a question, “What are you doing here?” The question is a quiet prompt to lay out before God the stirring of his soul – the heartbreak that his life's work of preaching and teaching the principles of God's kingdom has been rejected and condemned by

the very ones who are supposed to be God's people. Where is the faithfulness? Elijah's life – though precious to the Lord – is in danger being extinguished by these lawless and powerful pagans. In the calm, the Lord is about to send Elijah on a vital mission to change the course of history in the Holy Land.

This same voice of absolute authority and quiet power is the voice of Jesus as He banishes all those demons from the Gerasene man – the man called Legion.

When the man was cleansed and sane, he begged Jesus to take him along on His mission journey. But Jesus sends the man as a missionary to proclaim the greatness of God.

Elijah wraps himself in his prophet's mantle to stand before the Almighty. The Gerasene demoniac emerges from the mighty work of God in his very soul "clothed and in his right mind."

Faith, assurance and trust – these are the garments of a child of God. We arrive at this

place not by our own hard work and striving. No, we are clothed **by God** in Christ. Our Savior removes us from the working of the Law among the lawless. We are no longer rebels subject to condemnation. This is a covenant of God by the very blood of Jesus.

The outward sign of this inward grace – this mighty cleansing work – is our baptism into the body of Christ. The promise of deliverance – acceptance into God’s presence – belonging to the household of heaven. No earthly label can stick. We have become children of God. Amen.