

A Fearful Heart becomes a Doubting Heart!

Ever had one of those weeks when things couldn't get any worse and they do? You know the weeks that I'm talking about when finally all you can do is laugh because if you think about it too much, the tears will just come pouring down your face and it will just out like a flood. Ever had one of those weeks when there are more than one "I've had enough" moments than you can take? We get to the breaking point: "Lord, when are you going to do something about this?" Your fearful heart becomes a doubting heart.

Then you may know a bit how Elijah felt in our text. Elijah had demonstrated extreme courage standing in front of the evil King Ahab in the King's palace and on Mount Carmel. He witnessed God's miraculous supply by the brook in a time of draught; God providing for him in the home of the widow at Zarephath in the 3 ½ years of famine. He calls the prophets of Baal to a showdown at the "Madison Square Garden of the Day" on Mount Carmel. There on the big stage he called down fire from heaven that consumed the sacrifices in a spectacular way. 450 prophets of Baal were killed that day. Then we are told that **"The power of the Lord came on Elijah and, tucking his cloak into his belt, he ran ahead of Ahab all the way to Jezreel."** He outran the King and his chariot back to the capital city of that time. Why would he run back to the capital when he knew that Ahab and Jezebel had wanted him dead? He must have expected that now God would either take out the king and queen or move the people to do it. Why wouldn't God have done that?

Elijah must have been on more than cloud nine – he was on cloud 99. It couldn't have gotten much better than this in the life of a prophet. He had followed God's commands. Through Elijah, God had demonstrated his power in a spectacular way. **"When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, "The Lord—he is God! The Lord—he is God!"** Finally, maybe now, they would listen to God. They would have to pay attention or God would unleash his full wrath on these unbelieving and ungrateful people.

What then did God do? Nothing. Nothing changes. There is no change in the hearts of the people of Israel. Absolutely, NOTHING happens. Ahab and Jezebel are not impressed. The people don't seem to care. The nations around Israel don't rise up against Ahab. Nothing happens.

Now, they get worse. When Queen Jezebel heard what Elijah had done, she sends this threat to Elijah: **"May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them."** (1 Kings 19:2) What does Elijah do? What does the prophet of God who was fed by ravens, who raised a child back to life, who calls down fire from heaven do? He runs and he is afraid. He is so afraid that he cries out to God: **"I have had enough, Lord," he said. "Take my life."** All he wanted to do is to die. His fearful heart became a doubtful heart.

Ever felt the same way? Ever feel like God is doing nothing? Things are not supposed to be going this way? You doubt that God really cares about you. Fear has a way of doing that, doesn't it? So often, fear has a way of taking our eyes off of our God. Fear has a way of getting us to think that God has failed us! In our Gospel Lesson for this morning, we see what fear can do. Jesus tells Peter to **"come"** out to him. Peter walks on water. Human beings do not walk on water. They especially don't walk on water in a storm. It would be like trying to walk on water in the middle of Hurricane Harvey. **"When he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!"** Fear got the best of him. His fearful heart became a doubtful heart.

What was God's response to Elijah's fearful and doubtful heart? In the verses right before our text, we are told: **"The angel of the Lord came back (a second time) and touched him and said, "Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you."** Elijah was a broken man. He was tired. He was beat. What does God do? He comes and cooks for him. He doesn't tell Elijah to pray harder. He doesn't come to tell Elijah that he's being an idiot right now. He gives him what he needed. He needed to eat and get his strength back again.

Second thing that God does is listens to Elijah. **“The word of the Lord came to him: “What are you doing here, Elijah?”** When God comes and asks a question, he is not asking it to find out information. He even asks the question twice -- once before he comes in the still small voice and once after.

He’s giving Elijah a chance to speak so that he can listen. Elijah is scared. He is full of doubt. He’s confused. For a while God listens to Elijah complain about the Israelites. He speaks how unfair God has been to allow the other prophets of God to be put to death. Finally, he lets Elijah complain that he is the only believer left and God can’t even take care of him because the King and Queen are trying to kill him.

Eventually, God steps in. **“The Lord said, “Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.”** God is going to show Elijah who he is. **“Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper.”**

Even though God has come into this world with powerful wind, fire and earthquakes to judge, that isn’t who he is. Even though God has more power than we ever could imagine, his will is to be that **“gentle whisper”** or as the King James translates it: **“a still small voice.”** Jesus came into this world to suffer the full wrath of his heavenly Father, so that he could also bring that **“still small voice”** of grace. He comes to us in His Word and tells us that our sins are forgiven, we are saved and we can go in peace. He tells us in his Word: **“There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free.”** (Romans 8:1-2) He assures us that nothing **“will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”** (Romans 8:39) He fills our fearful and doubtful hearts with the promise: **“It is Finished.”** No need to fear. No need to doubt. Our God comes to us in that still small voice to assure that we are his and we are in his hand.

Elijah heard the message of God and he trusted it. Hundreds of years later, he would stand on a mountain with Jesus and Moses in the Lord’s full glory before Peter, James and John. Someday, because of the Lord working through that still small voice, we will join Moses and Elijah with Jesus in heaven. What do we do with a doubtful heart? We let the Lord fill it with faith and grace. Amen.