



Elijah is alone in the wilderness, afraid for his life, ready to give up.

“It is enough now, O Lord; take away my life.”

What brought him to this difficult place?

What role has Elijah played, as a prophet of God in an unfaithful kingdom?

And how does he get up and go on to do the work God asks of him?

We'll start with some history.

Last week, we read about King Solomon and the building of the temple.

When Solomon died, his sons went to war, and the kingdom was divided into two

The northern kingdom of Israel, with Samaria as the capital

And the southern kingdom of Judah, with Jerusalem as the capital.

Elijah was a prophet in the northern kingdom of Israel in the 9th century BCE.

The king, Ahab, secured an alliance with the Phoenecians

by marrying Jezebel and making her queen,

and encouraging the people to worship Baal alongside Yahweh.

This was not a part of the exclusive covenant God had made with the Israelites –

I will be your God, and you will be my people-

You shall have no other gods

Elijah spoke out against Ahab and Jezebel, against the worship of Baal.

And Jezebel killed and oppressed the prophets of Yahweh.

Just before our story begins, Elijah had set up a test

to test Baal's power against Yahweh's

They made two altars, and the priests of Baal prayed all day,

but no fire consumed the offering upon their altar.

Elijah poured water all over his altar, and when he prayed to Yahweh,

his altar burned to the ground, the offering consumed.

Then Elijah and his followers killed the priests of Baal.

Queen Jezebel vowed revenge again Elijah, and so he ran –

from the north of Israel to the wilderness in the south of Judah.

And there he collapsed on the ground and complained,

“It is enough now; take my life away.”

How does God respond to this crisis in the life of his servant?

People read the story differently.

Some see impatience and blame in God's response to Elijah,

and the appointing of Elisha as a punishment.



But I see in this story a response of tenderness and care for Elijah.
First, angels come to him where he is lying near despair,
and touch him gently, and give him food.
After the first angel, he is given more rest.

The second angel sends him on his way to the mountain of God.

At the mountain God asks Elijah, What are you doing here?

And Elijah complains,

“I have done all you asked of me, O Lord; serving you has consumed me.

Now I am alone, and my life is in danger. It is too much”

And God appears to Elijah, in an echo of God’s appearance to Moses on this mountain generations before.

But while God appeared to Moses in fire and storm,

God’s presence with Elijah is something different.

It is quiet, gentle.

A moment of stillness; a quiet voice of comfort and strength.

God asks again, What are you doing here, Elijah.

And still Elijah complains.

So, God tells him what to do next.



Elijah seems to think the work of saving Israel depends on him alone.

So God reminds him that it is not so.

God sends him out to appoint new leaders to accomplish God’s purpose.

Elijah is to anoint a new king for Israel,

and a new Aramean king to defeat Ahab.

And, Elijah is to anoint a new prophet, Elisha,

who will be his companion and student and, eventually, take his place.

Finally, God assures Elijah that there will be many faithful people left in Israel –

that Elijah’s work is not in vain, and he is not alone.

It is another act of grace and care – to send Elijah back to work,

to remind him of his purpose,

and the community where he belongs and serves.

As I read the story of Elijah this week, I heard the story of a prophet -

a faithful servant of God – coming to the end of his rope.

A prophet who needed care and courage to continue his work

of speaking against corrupt and oppressive leaders.

And I was reminded of contemporary prophets,

also speaking for God’s people against injustice and oppression.



In the Working Preacher commentary, Professor Charles Aaron Jr. shares a story from Martin Luther King Jr's book of sermons, *Strength to Love*.

Aaron writes,

Elijah, the “troubler of Israel”, demonstrates the risk that a prophet takes. He has challenged Ahab, and paid the price. His experience in chapter 19 reminds one of the dangers faced by modern-day prophets.

Martin Luther King, Jr. reported his ordeal from a late-night telephone call during the Montgomery bus boycott. The voice on the other end threatened and insulted him, causing him insomnia. He felt the temptation to step away from his leadership role, but feared appearing cowardly. Moving from the bedroom to the kitchen, he drank coffee and prayed. The response to his prayer came in the form of a feeling of the Divine presence. A reassuring inner voice promised God's support. Even after the bombing of his home shortly after the experience, King felt a sense of peace.¹

Aaron concludes that *One can find intriguing parallels between King's experience and Elijah's: the threat, the temptation to quit, and God's affirmation in a quiet voice.*



I heard another story last week on the radio podcast Today, Explained, about the challenges and risks of prophetic action.

It was a story about the people protesting at the Broadview ICE facility in Chicago, particularly two pastors who have joined in the protests along with a number of local clergy.

You may remember the story in late September,

and this photo of Pastor David Black just seconds after he was shot in the head with pepper balls by ICE agents during a protest.

The interview was with Pastor Quincy Worthington

who was there that day, and a regular participant in the protests.



The interviewer asked if his experience has changed his feelings about law enforcement. Pastor Worthington replied,

I think this has changed my feelings about just about everything. ..

on a personal level it's caused me to struggle with and think deeper about my own faith and about what it means to be a person of faith, and what it means to be a citizen of this country.

As a minister and a professionally trained theologian, we often tend to think of these things in abstract ideas. There's this idea of essentially picking up your cross and following Christ, or are you willing to die for your faith, and those were kind of abstract ideas for me. ...I've been forced to confront the very real possibility that by

living out my Christian convictions I'm putting myself in serious jeopardy. For me, the call to follow Christ has to reign supreme in my life, and what I witness in the life and teachings of Jesus is a man who stands up to unfair oppression, he speaks boldly and prophetically about standing up for the least of these, about trying to give voice to those who feel voiceless and standing with people who can't stand by themselves and giving hope to the hopeless. ... I think the lynchpin, the reasoning behind that is that Jesus firmly believed that every person is a precious child of God, and that we are all created in the image of God, and that's something that's sacred and needs to be protected.

So when I see things that are blatant human rights violations and the denial of basic human rights to our brothers and sisters, I feel like if I'm going to stand in the pulpit on Sunday with any integrity and preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, then I need to stand with Jesus at Broadview to protect the humanity of everyone involved.



It's hard work, to speak up for our faith – to speak truth to power.
To show up with and on behalf of people who are vulnerable.
Sometimes it's risky.

Elijah complains that he is alone –

and I think a lot of us can recognize that feeling –
of being overwhelmed and overcome by the pain of the world,
feeling powerless in the face of systemic oppression.



But the story of Elijah - the stories of Martin Luther King Jr and Pastor Black and
Pastor Worthington and all the protestors in Chicago –
remind us that we are not alone in the work.

How God ministers to Elijah echoes how God ministers to us.

God's angels attend to us; God speaks to us

sometimes in a still, small voice,
sometimes in the words of scripture,
sometimes in the people around us,
or in the memory and witness of the saints who have gone before us.

It may be the love of a pet, the beauty of yellow trees in the bosque,
or a song that moves our heart.

God comforts and encourages us in many ways.

And God gives us a community of faithful people

to share the work of spreading God's love, mercy and justice in the world.

We are called to follow Jesus – and we are not alone.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.