

2015 NL2 WK9 1 Kings 18:20-39  
15-11-08 Elijah at Mt. Carmel

God's beloved people, grace and peace to you in the name of our crucified and risen Savior,  
Jesus Christ.....Amen.....

We are introduced to King Ahab of Israel today. It is said of this king, "Ahab did more to provoke the anger of the LORD, the God of Israel, than had all the kings of Israel who were before him." 16:33

And that's saying something!!! Last week we heard of King Jeroboam who set up the golden calves at the boundaries of the northern kingdom called Israel. And he was said to have done what was evil in the sight of the Lord because he then caused Israel to sin since he proclaimed that these were their gods.

What??? Didn't the people know better?? Hadn't they listened to the stories of the faith told to them by their parents?? These statues were not gods; they had no power; they didn't move; [and even if they were only graven images of gods...]

And the 4 kings between Jeroboam and Ahab left those idols for the people to worship. And there were a host of other gods that they prayed to including Baal, who was said to be the god of rain, dew, and fertility.

So when Elijah proclaims that there would be a drought, God was attacking Baal at the heart of his claims. And for 3 years, there was drought and famine. For 3 long years Baal gave no voice, no answer, no response to the drought.

Finally Elijah comes back to Ahab and tells him to gather his prophets, 450 of them are the prophets of Baal. Meet me on Mt. Carmel, and we'll see whose God is the Lord.

When they gathered, Elijah asked the crowd, "How long will you go limping with two different opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him." Elijah is setting them up to finally either follow YHWH or not. Ahab and his wife Jezebel had been doing everything in their power to stifle the word of God among the people. Jezebel had gone out and had a bunch of prophets of God killed, and Ahab kept the people worshiping idols and other gods.

So there was not only a drought of water in the land, but a famine of God's word, too. No water, no word. And Elijah says he's the only one left. So on that mountain top, there are 450 prophets of Baal to 1 prophet of YHWH. The rules as Elijah presents them for this contest are that each team will prepare a sacrifice and see which god answers by fire.

Elijah elects to defer his chance to the second half, so team Baal prepares their bull and sets up their sacrifice. And they begin calling on Baal – all morning until noon, "But there was no voice and no answer." So they danced in their limping fashion – like Elaine on Seinfeld!!! And nothing!

THEN Elijah starts getting a little cocky... and he starts trash talking... where is your god? He must be out taking a walk, or on a journey, or maybe he's asleep.

So they cut themselves giving an offering of blood in the ways of Voldemort. But the only blood that saves, turns out, is the blood of YHWH himself in the person of Jesus. But the prophets raved on and in the end there was still, "no voice, no answer, no response" from Baal.

Then it's Elijah's turn. He calls all the people closer so that they can see all that's happening. He sets up his altar with 12 tribal stones, a bull, and the wood. And for an added twist he has a trinity of 4 water jars filled and brought to pour over the sacrifice so that even the

trench around it all was filled. There was no way that an errant spark was going to light up this baby! It would have to be a powerful God to get this going! And what about Elijah wasting so much water in a time of drought anyway??

All was ready..... Elijah says a simple prayer (basically), “Oh Lord, show the people that you are God!” And there’s no drama, no waiting, no question!!!.... The Lord comes in fire!! The Lord sent fire and it consumed the burnt offering, the wood, the stones, the dust, and all the water.

AND the people fell to the ground proclaiming, “The Lord indeed is God!” No more limping with two opinions.

But King Ahab is mad. He continues to provoke God, and finally God tells him that he’s going to do away with Ahab and his reign. THEN Ahab repents in sackcloth and ashes, and God forgives him. Can you believe it!?!? This scoundrel, one who had continually provoked God to anger, who broke God’s heart from start to finish. Who walked in the idolatrous ways of his predecessors, even Ahab, God forgives.

God’s persistence paid off. God had come to Ahab in Elijah. God proved his steadfast love by not abandoning the people in the northern kingdom of Israel even though they had walked away from God.

So bring your worst.... If you’re sitting there wondering if you God will forgive you, think Ahab. If God comes to Ahab, then God has certainly come to you. Not that it’s a contest to see who can provoke God the most, or push God over the ledge of the possibility of forgiveness.

But it’s the promise of God that because of Jesus, and HIS shed blood and resurrection, there will never be a spiritual drought of water and word in your life. God will never keep himself from you, and God has sealed that promise to you in your baptism. We cling to the water and the word of promise that in Jesus, you are a child of God. That even your worst can’t separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus your Lord.

We hunger and thirst for God’s presence among us – so we come.... The week can feel like a drought, so we come.... Our baptism may seem so far away, so to be reminded of the promise, we come.... We might be limping up the ramp, but we come.... To hear, feel, and taste forgiveness.

The words of forgiveness and continued acceptance that you receive from God are your lifeblood. And God invites you to share those reconciling words with people around you. There is no greater gift that you can give someone than to forgive.

You live in the world. There are people around you. You will do something to disappoint them, and they will disappoint you. Sometimes it will even be accidental!! ☺ Even people in the church will disappoint you. None of us is perfect. THAT’s why we’re here. If we were perfect, we wouldn’t need to come. But we all come to hear again the words of forgiveness proclaimed. That even the stuff I did this week, maybe even to you, is forgiven by God.

We come to receive forgiveness so that we can also share it. No limping around being tempted to withhold forgiveness, or seeking revenge, or holding righteous indignation.

But the bounty of forgiveness – the life giving, soul watering words. Cling to them and share them. God loves and forgives you.

AMEN.....