

**Holy Cross, Daggett and St. Mark, Wallace Lutheran Churches, Michigan**  
**August 31, 2014**  
**1 Kings 19:9-18**

*And the word of the LORD came to him: "What are you doing here, Elijah?" He replied, "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." The LORD said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by." 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. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.*

*Then a voice said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" He replied, "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." The LORD said to him, "Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus. When you get there, anoint Hazael king over Aram. Also, anoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet. Jehu will put to death any who escape the sword of Hazael, and Elisha will put to death any who escape the sword of Jehu. Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and all whose mouths have not kissed him."*

People can use the question, “What are you doing here” in a variety of ways. It can be asked when people are happy, scared or afraid. A happy time is when an active duty soldier is able to attend his brother’s wedding without anyone knowing that he is coming. Another happy time is when a person who is deathly ill is able to make it to an event which they weren’t supposed to make it to. People will ask the unexpected guests, “What are you doing here?” with joy and happiness.

It is a question asked by people who are filled with guilt and fear. A teenage daughter might be filled with guilt and fear when she asks her parents, “What are you doing here?” because they showed up at a party that she didn’t want them to know about. Why is she filled with fear and guilt? She is afraid because she doesn’t know what they saw her doing and she feels guilty since she knows she has broken their trust.

Some people might ask this question because they are scared. They come home to find their front picture window smashed in and the intruder still in their home. The homeowners ask the intruder, “What are you doing here?” out of terror because the intruder is robbing their home. These are a few of the ways this question can be asked. I want us to keep these ways in mind as we focus on the question God asks Elijah and us, “What are we doing here?”

Our lesson begins right in the middle of a story about one of God’s prophets Elijah. It is a trying time for Elijah. His heart is filled with trouble and doubt. The previous chapter records the mighty confrontation between Elijah and the prophets of Baal. This confrontation takes place during the divided kingdom in Israel. The state religion of the 10 northern tribes is worship of the false god Baal. It is promoted by awful King Ahab and his wicked wife Jezebel.

Elijah is on the other side of this confrontation. He serves the Lord who is the only true and living God. Ahab and Elijah meet at a place called Mt. Carmel. Ahab brings 850 prophets with him to face Elijah. Elijah issues the challenge: we will build two altars and offer two sacrifices on them. However, they won’t start a fire to burn the sacrifices. They will ask their gods to light the sacrifices on fire. Whoever lights the fire is the true God. The prophets accept the challenge.

They spend all day praying to Baal, but he never answers. Finally, Elijah is ready to offer his sacrifice. He requests large amounts of water to be poured on the sacrifice and then he prays, **“O LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command. Answer me, O LORD, answer me, so these people will know that you, O LORD, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again.”**

**“Then the fire of the LORD fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench. When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, ‘The LORD--he is God! The LORD--he is God!’”** The Lord answers Elijah’s prayer and he feels triumphant. However, his triumph is short lived. Jezebel hears about it and threatens 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.”**

Elijah reads between the lines and understands her message which tells him, “Get out of here, Elijah, or you are a dead man.” The message fills him with trouble and doubt. Depressed, he runs for his life to

this very spot we find him today. Elijah has been wandering for a little over 40 days. He is down in the dumps and thinks that he is the only believer who is left in Israel. This belief has led him to ask the Lord to take his life. The Lord didn't and so he wanders to the place he believes he will find God: Mt. Horeb.

Mt. Horeb, aka Mt. Sinai, is the place where God appeared to Moses and the Israelites as they were coming out of Egypt. Elijah wanders here and hides in the cave we find him in. **“And the word of the LORD came to him: ‘What are you doing here, Elijah?’ He replied, ‘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.’**

The Lord finds Elijah in the cave and how does he respond? He whines about the way the Lord is directing his life. He is saying, “Lord, I don't like the way you are doing things in my life. My life would be a lot easier if you actually listened to me once in a while and did things my way. Can't you do that for me? Can't you do it for me just once? What am I doing here? I am here because I am miserable.” Elijah's self-centeredness is blind unbelief because he doubts God's promise to love him.

Don't our lives often mirror Elijah's doubt filled ways? God has promised that he is in control of everything and working out for our eternal good. Are there times in your life this promise seems hard to believe? This promise is hard to believe when it feels like my life is falling apart because sin has destroyed a relationship with someone I love. This promise is hard to believe when I am stuck in the depths of depression like Elijah.

Jesus has promised that nothing will overcome his church here on earth. Do the difficult times the church is experiencing here make you doubt this promise? Traditional marriage is under attack. People say it is nothing more than a piece of paper between a man and a woman. Who needs it? People believe it is hurtful and wrong to deny the rights of all people to marry. Islamists are targeting Christians and killing them all over the world. Do these things make Jesus' promise sound hollow and fake?

It can be incredibly hard to trust God's promises in these situations. Doubt starts to creep in. It makes us want to question God and ask, “Are you sure you know what you are doing? Why have you abandoned me Lord? Why are my relationships on the rocks? Why don't I ever climb out of this hole of depression? Why don't you do something to defend your church? Why do you let opponents of your church win all the time? Why don't you listen to me God and do it my way?”

We are guilty just like Elijah. How does God deal with us? **“The LORD said, “Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by.” 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. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.”** The Lord summoned Elijah to the mouth of the cave. He was going to show Elijah his glory. Elijah witnessed three things: he saw a mighty wind, a great

earthquake and a fire, but he realized this wasn't the glory of God. Finally, a gentle whisper appeared at the mouth of the cave and Elijah knew that it was the glory of the Lord.

The whisper reminded Elijah of what God's glory actually is. God's glory is in the promises which God makes to us through the still and quiet voice of the gospel. It isn't in his ability to control the events of this world. It is his ability to keep every single one of his promises which he makes to us. The voice of the Lord brought back to Elijah the memory of the covenant God had made with Moses and the Israelites many years ago.

God had chosen Israel to bring his promised savior into this world. This promised savior wouldn't be a political savior. He wouldn't give us an easy life on earth. He wouldn't bend to our will. He came to be our savior from sin. God had promised to send this savior into the world and this was the message which Elijah was to carry back to Israel. He was to remind the Israelites about the God he served. He served the God of free and faithful love who promised to send a savior into this world to save them from their sins.

This is the promise which God points us to when we doubt his love for us. He points us to the fact that he kept his promise to Elijah. He sent his one and only son Jesus into this world to save us from our sins. Jesus carried out God's promise on a different mountain. He carried it out on a mountain called Calvary. Jesus took all of our sins upon himself at Calvary and satisfied God's wrath over our sins on it. This is what he points to when we have doubts. He points to how he kept his promise to us.

This is the reason we have gathered here today. We are here to be reminded God has fulfilled his promise to send Jesus into this world to save us. This promise reassures us he still loves us even when we doubt his promises because our relationships are falling apart or we doubt his promise that nothing will overcome his church here on earth. God is in control. Nothing can change this fact. This is what we came to hear. Amen.