

Pastor Roy's sermon from August 9, 2015

I Kings 19:4-8, Psalm 34:1-8, Ephesians 4:25-5:2; John 6:35,41-52

Have you ever given up? Decided it's time to quit or do something differently? What you are trying to accomplish is either not worthwhile, or not possible given your skill set and gifting. To change one's mind. Once I thought I would never be a chaplain. Then I spent 12 good years serving seniors in Adult Day Care and chaplaincy. Once I said I would never go back to school, then I took 6 classes at Gettysburg Seminary toward ordination in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

In some cases, it is wise to change one's mind. It is wise to stop. Turn. Head in a new direction. Sometimes wisdom is found in pressing on and refusing to give up. When one is convinced of the cause, failure is better than giving up. The polio vaccine. Blood transfusions. The lightbulb. The telephone. Renewable energy resources.

In I Kings 19, Elijah has given up. Despair has set in. He set his career goals and accomplished them—a three year journey through drought, he defeated the prophets of Baal at Mt Carmel—yet his success didn't matter. He won the battle but the queen was still after him, and his efforts would be undone when her soldiers caught up to him. His goals had been misplaced. Defeating Baal turned out to be a poor goal. How could he defeat something that lived in the heads of his people?

Calling Israel to trust in Yahweh, the God who provides, the God who heard and rescued Israel from bondage in Egypt this hard work of calling the people to faithfulness, it was too much for him to do alone. So he was thereby submitting his resignation. He had taken God's place.

He was isolated, alone. Elijah had come to think it was all about him--all depended on him. But Elijah was not alone. Ravens and angels fed him. Many, many folks in Israel were still prepared to serve and love this God who hears. And after Mt Carmel where God answers with fire to consume Elijah's sacrifice, he learns that God is not in the fire, nor the earthquake, nor in the wind storm, but God *is* in the stillness. The God of the stillness calls Elijah to be still, to rest, to recall that there is no battle. The presence of the Life and Mercy is beyond question. There is no confrontation. Elijah can let go of the need to win. Of course, Elijah is hard wired to win. The survival instinct is strong in him and us. But the Divine Mystery calls Elijah to deep trust, and *then* to act. So, the mighty *do* fall from their thrones, and the poor *are* raised up to places of honor and mercy. And Elijah's story of faith goes on with the struggle to trust, to hope, to listen in the stillness so that wisdom may prevail. The faith of Israel does grow even after Elijah is gone and this faith continues to develop as all the people trust, hope, and wait in the presence of this Presence who cannot be defeated or undone.

Jesus was caught up with Elijah in this mercy, in this goodness, in this faith of Israel. Faith in waiting in the quiet. Acting in the chaos. And Jesus knew that it was not *all* about him. Sometimes we make it all about him, but he never did. He entrusted the future of the Kingdom of God into the hands of his simple, dedicated followers and all those who would carry on this faith.

He laid down his life for that future, for those friends because he knew that this Kingdom would prevail over the one that was going to claim his life. The cross would be painful but it was powerless to undo his love. It was powerless to undo the foundation of the universe. The hate of the ignorant and lost would always be swallowed up in generosity and freedom. *His friends would prevail.* Love, mercy, and friendship known in stillness will always prevail.

The writer of Ephesians lives in this Coming Kingdom. So, speak the truth to neighbors with whom we have **very** much in common. And let those who have stolen, work with their hands so that they may share with those in need. And let **all** speak words of grace, to build up and encourage faithfulness. Put away violence, and heavy handedness, and be kind to all, with tenderness and forgiveness, even as God in Christ has forgiven us. Live in love as Christ loved and gave himself up for all.

Elijah learns that good goals make for good action and good ministry. All born of listening carefully to the Spirit of God in silence and with others. We can give up our need to win and achieve all our carefully crafted outcomes. We can let it go and live in the land of faith. As individuals, as congregations, as a parish. What are good goals? What changes should we make? What should we continue to pursue as we wait with Elijah, and Jesus, and the writer of Ephesians as we listen in silence and think of goals and plans?