

St. David's Presbyterian Church
St. John's, NL
"Hope for Inward/Outward Change"
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Communion Sunday

One of the most interesting parts of the New Testament is a little section at the end of the book of James. We didn't read it this morning, but it encourages us to pray for one another. This is something we do Sunday and week by week. It also encourages us to pray for one another for healing and anointing with oil, an ancient practice which simply means giving the health and wholeness of the individual over to God. If you would like this today or any other time, please tell me and I would be glad to be there for you. This is followed with an encouragement to confess our sins to one another, that is, to be open with each other in the areas where we struggle, so that God can change us and we can experience victory over the dark parts of our inner life. James tells us that a praying person, who is righteous because of what Jesus has done for that person at the Cross and the Resurrection, has power to change lives, something like Elijah.

Now we did read about Elijah this morning. James reminds us that he prayed and the weather changed for three years and a half years. James also tells us Elijah is just like us. Does this mean that we too can control the weather if we pray? I don't think so. Many people over the years when I came to Newfoundland would ask me if I brought some nice weather from away, and I usually would say if I had that kind of power, look out. But what James means about us being like Elijah is that for all the miracles Elijah performed, he was just like you and me.

In fact, as we consider what we read in 1 Kings 19, we see the picture of a very human person, relating to God. Elijah was running away after his great victory over the 400 prophets of the false god Baal. Wicked queen Jezebel sent out the death squads for Elijah and vowed to kill him within 24 hours. Elijah felt the depths of fear (v. 3), he was suicidal (v. 4), he was not eating. He was what some people would diagnose as clinically depressed. He went into a cave, which is what depression feels like, a dark place away from everyone and everything, and he felt very alone. Many of us feel this way, even when there are lots of people around. The other thing he felt was that he was the only one left who trusted God, I suppose this might be called paranoia. But since there actually were people out to kill him, he wasn't all that paranoid. He felt alone in his faith.

Where do you and I go when we feel alone in our faith? Where do you and I go when we feel like no one can stand with us? No one understands?

At this point in the story, the great weather events begin. The first event is wind, something we know about here. But this was no ordinary wind. It “tore the mountains” and “shattered the rocks.” This indeed was a powerful wind. There are many winds in our lives, some in God’s direction, some away from God. We need to know what winds to go with, and what winds to resist. After the wind was an earthquake, which we hear about on the news more and more regularly. Doesn’t it seem like earthquakes are increasing? Perhaps it is just the reporting of them. And then there is a fire, also something we hear of regularly in the news, whether it be a lawyers’ office building or a home around the bay.

But interestingly enough in this 1 Kings 19 Scripture, we don’t see God speaking through these weather events. He doesn’t choose the catastrophe as the context to speak. He doesn’t take the microphone and turn up the volume to the point of the person’s car next to me at a stop light (boom-boom, boom-boom). He quietly comes next to Elijah and you and me, and addresses in almost a whisper. Such a whisper is easy to drown out in our day to day busy-ness and to ignore. You have to listen to hear.

At the end of the passage beyond where we read this morning, Elijah is given some of his last tasks in life, anointing kings, local and foreign, and a prophet to take his place, Elisha.

The place of the cave is a shelter for reflection. It is a place many of us go to deal with our hurts, to consider our identities anew, to ask for mercy in our relationships and be wise in relationship to the past. This is particularly difficult for those who have been abused. The past continually looms over these individuals, whether physically, sexually, or emotionally abused, the past seems to overwhelm the present. This is true for our aboriginal friends who gone through so much, in war with the colonists, in conflict with the government who may or may not have wanted their best in education, but in case wound up abused and deprived of their culture and identity.

Now let me again say that it is good the church tried to bring the Gospel to native peoples. It is good to desire an education for someone so as to be able to advance in their lives and knowledge. But what happened to the native

peoples is not good, in taking away of their culture, in the abuse, physically, emotionally, sexual. These are never good and never should defended.

All of us, whether aboriginal or not, who have experienced the pain of abuse, an addiction in a family member or as our own experience, know the place of the cave. It is a shelter. It is a place where God can whisper words of hope. The cave has a table in it. On the table are written the words "This do in remembrance of me." We remember today the One who felt betrayal, who knew torture and mocking, who was poor and didn't have a place to lay his head. This was the King who came and lived a common life, and gave himself for us. This One calls us to love others, to speak the truth, to make a place of hope, and direct us all to God, the One who can change us inwardly and outwardly.

In a certain federal prison in Saskatchewan, was such a table with those words "This do in remembrance of me." Some of the inmates had stolen the letters. The chaplain didn't seem too dismayed. He took the letters that were left and saw what kind of words could be re-attached to the table. He looked and pondered. Then the word came forth: f – r – e – e – d – o – m. And he put the one word back on the table, freedom. Now when the inmates saw this word, they cursed and swore in that chapel, more than ever before. What is that word doing there? They felt mocked. But they were being invited to the place of freedom.

That is the essence of the Gospel, what Jesus has done for us is to bring us freedom, wholeness, peace. No matter whether we are in a maximum security penitentiary or in a cave where we re-live but have no relief from abuse or other difficult memories. No matter whether we consider our lives to be fine and wonderful, no matter if we believe we have the answers to change the world or even change ourselves, we come to the Table, to say, "Have your way, Lord, in my life."

Let us pray.