



## Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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July 8, 2007

6<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

1 Kings 19:14-21

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: 1 Kings 19:14-21

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 62

Second Lesson: Galatians 5:1, 13-25

Gospel: Luke 9:51-62

### **Remember: God is in Control**

We can all be forgetful at times, can't we? You have found yourself walking into a room and standing in the middle of the room and looking around and thinking, "Why am I here? What was I coming to get?" You've done that, haven't you? We all have those slips of memory at times. Sometimes we forget, for other reasons than just a slip of the memory, sometimes we forget because we didn't really pay all that close of attention to begin with.

Did you notice what you asked God to do in the last hymn we just sang? Did you notice the invitation you gave to God and the powerful words that you sang in that third verse? You all just said to God, "Go, then, earthly fame and treasure! Come, disaster, scorn and pain!" Is it the first time this week that you have invited disaster, scorn and pain into your life? I would guess so. "In your service pain is pleasure; With your favor loss is gain. I have called you Abba, Father! You my all in all shall be. Storms may howl, and clouds may gather; All must work for good to me." Those are incredibly powerful words that we just sang. Did you notice them?

Did you notice what you were saying? As you go through disaster, scorn and pain, and as you have storms that howl and clouds that gather into your life, do you also remember the last phrase of that verse that I just read for you? "All must work for good to me." That is a scriptural truth that I think this morning we see Elijah forgetting, and I know it's a scriptural truth that at times I forget and I am betting you also forget. When some of the difficulties, some of the storms, some of the things that are a trouble in this world come into our lives, we forget this truth that God is still in control and "All must work for good to me." That is why our God has us together this morning so we can look at these words from 1 Kings 19 and be reminded that God is in control even when it seems like he is not.

Elijah was reminded of that. God reminded Elijah, and he reminds us, that God is the one who executes justice. God is the one who works through his Word. And God is the one that provides for his church even when you and I don't always see it.

I don't know how much time you have spent studying the life of Elijah, but I think he is absolutely fascinating. Absolutely, positively fascinating! I once sat in a study group of pastors, when we were getting together and studying every other week, studying sermon text when we would do better as pastors to study the life of Elijah. We all come out of the Seminary thinking we are going to be like the apostle Paul—that we are going to speak and people are going to listen and God is going to change the world through

the gospel that we proclaim. Then we get into a congregation and we stand in front of people, and I can tell you how many of you have cavities because I see your heads tipped back and your mouths wide open while I am talking to you. I tell you your sins are completely and absolutely forgiven, and I see people looking around at each other, looking around to see who is here and who is not here and what is going on. There are plenty of things that are awfully discouraging as you leave worship at times. I just wish I could get one of those cameras on my gown so you guys could see once what I sometimes see when I look out at worship.

Or you go and visit people, you go and talk to inactive members and you get promises made to you and then promises broken. You pray and you struggle and you think, “This time they are listening” as you share the Word with someone. Then you find out that they are not.

But that is not only in the pastoral ministry, is it? Do you have people that you love that are farther away from their Savior than you wish they were? People that you pray about, that you share the gospel with and that you talk to, and they don’t seem to listen? Then you read in Isaiah where it says, “God, your Word will not return to you empty. It will accomplish its purpose” (see Isaiah 55:11). And you think, “God, I’m not seeing it. Things aren’t going the way I want. God, things don’t look right!” Then especially when you see at times how you struggle, you work for the Lord, you try to serve the Lord, you try to do your best, and you look down the road at a guy who could not care one iota for God and he prospers in everything he seems to do. He seems to have a newer car, a newer boat, a nicer cottage. He seems to have no troubles, no problems, no sicknesses, and then you look at your life and you see all the things that are going wrong and you say, “God, this isn’t fair! I’m serving you and that guy is some schmo who could care less about you, and you seem to be pouring blessings on him. What is the problem, God?”

Fill in your own blanks. There have to be times in our lives when we feel exactly like Elijah did. “God, I’ve served you faithfully and nothing is going right.” Elijah, prophet in the Northern Kingdom—the Northern Kingdom—all Godless kings. None of them loved the Lord—not one of them. But he served during the time when Ahab and Jezebel were King and Queen. Jezebel—that rings a bell, right? Evil woman—we use that word today. They were the worst of the worst, and he served during that time. They attacked and attacked and attacked the prophets, not verbally but physically, and put many of them to death.

God had told Elijah that there would be three years of famine. So he sent him off to the Brook Kerith Ravine, fed him with ravens and then sent him off. A few weeks ago we looked at where he went to that widow’s house where the oil and the flour didn’t run out and God continued to take care of him. Then he sent him back to talk to Ahab and that is when they had the great “sacrifice off” of the bulls—450 prophets of Baal cut up a bull, called on Baal all day long to consume the bull—that offering with fire—and nothing happened. They cut themselves. They danced. They shouted. They pranced. Whatever they did, nothing happened. Elijah mocked them.

Then Elijah called on the Lord after he had rebuilt the altar, after he had doused the offering with water so that a trench was full with gallons of water around it. He called on God to consume it with fire, and the fire came. The people said, “The Lord is God! The Lord is God!” (See 1 Kings 18.) And Elijah picks up his cloak and he runs in front of the chariot back to the capitol city. He is thinking, “Now, this is it! Things have changed! Now the people are going to listen!” But what he finds when he gets back to where Jezebel was is Jezebel who says, “You killed my 450 prophets. You are going to be like one of them.”

So the very day after his greatest triumph seemingly, when the people say they are going to turn back to the Lord, he is on the run for his life. He runs from the Northern Kingdom of Israel all the way down to Mount Horeb—the mountain of God—way, way south in the Sinai Peninsula. So it was a long run. It was a long journey. It was a long trek. When he gets there, he finally pours out his soul to God. He pours out his soul that is full of bitterness and doubt about God, about God being in control, and about what God is allowing to happen. “God, I’ve been very zealous for you. I have served you faithfully.” He is as much as saying, “I kept up my part of the bargain. Why aren’t you keeping up yours? They’ve killed the prophets! They are trying to kill me. No one listens. They have rejected your covenant. God, just take me out of this world. I’m sick of it! I’m no better than my ancestors that served before me. I’ve had enough! I want to check out!”

Do you notice that God doesn’t answer him directly? Instead, he basically tells him, “Suck it up! Go back the way you came. Go to the Desert of Damascus. That is the far north. And on your way, anoint Hazael king over Aram. Anoint Jehu son of Nimshi. Anoint Elisha son of Shaphat to succeed you as prophet. Here is why, Elijah. Do you think I don’t notice what is going on? Do you think I don’t notice who Ahab and Jezebel are? Do you think I don’t notice how the wicked are prospering and the righteous are suffering? Here is what is going to happen. Justice is still going to be executed. Jehu will put to death those who Hazael doesn’t punish. I am going to use wicked men to punish wicked people. I am going to use wicked kings like Hazael, like Jehu, but I am not only going to send someone to take care of them physically, I am going to send a prophet to replace you after you are gone. Elisha will serve me and he will continue to point people to me just as you have done. Justice will be served both in time and in eternity because I am going to take care of things.”

Even though Elijah doubted it, even though you and I at times doubt it, God is telling us that he is still in control. He knows what is going on. He knows what the guy down the road is going through. He knows what you are going through. He knows what you are hiding from your friends, from your spouses. He knows everything that you experience. He says, “I am still in control, and I will see to it that justice will be served.”

For you and me, for the times that you and I doubt God, the times that you and I get mad at God, the times that you and I shake our fists at God figuratively and say, “What in the world are you doing?”—justice being served might scare us, because that is sin. We don’t love God perfectly. We don’t trust him perfectly. We don’t revere him perfectly. But justice will be served in our lives also because God sent Jesus to live and die in our place for all those times that we have doubted God, all the times that we have

doubted that he is control, and all the times that we have doubted his justice. He has been completely and absolutely unfair because he punished Jesus instead of punishing you and instead of punishing me. If that doesn't thrill us to the tip of our toes, then "pinch yourself" as Luther said because you might just actually be dead already.

Our God loves us and is incredibly unfair. He takes away our sins fully and freely. And if that doesn't convince us that he knows what is going on and that he will execute justice in this world and in the next, then nothing will. Then we are hopeless because the Spirit isn't living in our hearts. But the Spirit that lives in our hearts assures us that the God who loved us enough to die for us loves us enough to be with us and take care of us now. He loves us enough to see to it that the Word will continue to work among his people.

One of Elijah's big complaints was, "I'm all alone, God. I don't see any results." God says, "I tell you there are 7,000 who haven't bowed down and kissed Baal and haven't worshipped Baal." God's Word preserves his church. He works through his Word. We might not always see it, and it might trouble us greatly that we don't see. I'll tell that is my single greatest challenge as a pastor—the frustration that comes with not seeing results of the Word as fast as I want to see them. Maybe you have experienced it too with a loved one who has drifted away from God, and you pray and you talk and you share the gospel with them, and you think it isn't helping. They seem to just be drifting farther away and in fact, now they get irritated at you whenever you talk about God's love for us in Christ as though that is a bad thing.

God has said that his Word will not return to him empty. We don't always see the results, just like Elijah didn't see the results. We might not see it in that person as we would want to, but God's Word will produce results. Maybe it is in us. Maybe he is strengthening us through these struggles we have. Maybe it is in the people around us or around that person that see our love and our concern and our peace and our quietness and our gentleness and all those fruits of the Spirit that Paul talked about in Galatians. Maybe they see that and then they listen to the Word that we speak. Maybe it's not until someone else comes and shares the Word with them that the seed takes root. But know for certain that God produces results. It's just not always going to be on our timetable. The sooner we remember that, the more joy we will have in our lives.

God also takes care of his church even though Elijah had doubted it. "God, you let all the prophets be killed. Who is going to serve you? How is it going to get done?" So God tells him, "Go anoint Elisha." Elisha seems to be an incredible kind of guy. Twelve yokes of oxen plowing in the field—he seems to be a well-to-do man at that time, I would assume. Then when he goes and says goodbye to his family, he stops right there in the field evidently and slaughters the oxen and burns the plowing equipment and serves a meal of thanks to the Lord that God was calling him to serve. He left it all, right then and there. He set aside evidently a great deal of wealth because he had a desire to serve the Lord and he counted it pure pleasure that God would call him to serve even though his service would often be difficult just like Elijah's.

It's an amazing thing to me. The call into ministry isn't a call to get rich, because Elisha left that behind. It's the call to serve. The people that are sitting around and near you

this morning, many of them have that ability to go, leave behind family and friends and go to some other place that they don't know and serve by sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ.

I suppose then the task that you and I have is to encourage them to do so. Not to say to them, as some people said to friends of mine, "Why are you thinking about going into the ministry? You will never make money there." But to recognize that without providing pastors and teachers, we won't have those to fill pulpits. We've made use of many pastors and teachers from our church body in this congregation over the years. And we've provided a number, yet there are still more that are here this morning that have that gift, that have that ability, that have the abilities that God has given them to go and share the gospel—to face difficulties, to face hardships, to face tough times, but to do it because you get to talk to people about Jesus Christ and his love and his forgiveness. You get to see it take root at times—not always like you want, but there are those times in ministry when you see the gospel comfort the grieving, enlighten those who don't know how they are saved, and you see the joy that is there, no matter what circumstances they are in, that our God loves us. You get to be the bearer of that good news.

So if you have those gifts, and there are many of you here this morning that do, maybe you should be the next Elisha!