



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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9th Sunday after Pentecost

1 Kings 18:16-19:18

Pastor Ross Henzi

God Enables Us to Go On

Have you ever had a moment in your life when everything seemed hopeless? Have you ever had a time when you just felt so down, so desperate, so depressed that you just wanted to crawl in a hole and die? Hopefully that has never happened to any of you, but it does happen to people all the time. It happens to the family that has just heard from the doctor that their father has cancer and there is nothing more they can do. It happens to the single mom who has a table full of unpaid bills. It happens to the couple that has been married for 12 years and yet the last couple of years have just really been a struggle. It happens to the teenage girl who wishes that she was part of the “in” crowd. And it happens to the widowed grandmother who sits alone in her apartment all day and all night—hopelessness—full and complete hopelessness.

We have an idea of what that is like, don't we? And so did Elijah. He was the first in a 400-year-line history of procession of Israelite prophets, and he could lay a legitimate claim to being one of the greatest prophets in the history of that nation. And yet, in the scriptural account that we are going to explore today, we find this man on the run and choking with fear and loneliness. So Elijah cries out, “Lord, take me now. I give up! My life; my situation is hopeless” (see 1 Kings 19:4).

Can you relate to Elijah? Can you peer into his experiences from 28 centuries before and transport them ahead into our time and into your life? If you can do that, then you have discovered the secret to Bible study and Bible reading. You see, God caused the Bible writer to record this incident for our learning and for our spiritual life. And if Elijah were here today, he would want us to know this most important truth. What he would do is he would say to us “when everything seems hopeless, let God find you giving up, getting help, and going on.”

Just prior to our text, we find out that Elijah had just completed a most incredible victory. He had challenged the priests of a fertility cult to a duel on Mount Carmel and he had won. As a result, 450 priests of Baal, prophets, were all put to death. And so you would think that Elijah is now thinking, “Okay, finally! We got rid of these guys. Finally now the people will stop worshipping false gods! Finally now the people will start listening to me. Finally they will start to worship once again the true God.” But that was not the case.

When wicked Queen Jezebel heard about Elijah's victory, she sent a messenger to Elijah with these words. “*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*” (1 Kings 19:2). She

wanted Elijah dead just like one of those prophets of Baal. And so now, in a very short period of time, all of Elijah's dreams came crashing down. This man of courage, he now finds himself afraid and running for his life. So what does he do? He complains to God. He said, *"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"* (1 Kings 19:10). You see, God's enemies seemed to be in charge and Elijah felt like he was the only one left. Every fiber of his being wanted to give up and he just wanted to die.

Now what had moved him to that point? What do you think it could be? Do you think he was afraid because of the threat of his life? Do you think maybe he was embarrassed because he had run away instead of standing up to the truth of God? Or maybe he was just worn out, burned out or tired from all the endless battles against all these people who could really care less about God? But whatever the reason was, Elijah was at the point where he was ready to give up and he concluded that everything was hopeless.

You know that that is like, too, don't you? It's the feeling that children get when they don't feel like they fit in. Have you ever watched a group of children play? There is always one or two that are off on the side because they don't feel like they fit in with everybody else. It's the feeling that parents get when we preach and pray and we give and we guide and the kids still get into trouble. It's the feeling we get at work when the pressure just becomes unending and overbearing. It's the feeling we get when the doctor says "there is nothing more that I can do for you." It's the stress that mom feels when after working all day, she comes in the house and she notices that the kitchen sink is filled with dirty dishes, there are mounds of clothes to wash, there are kids to cart around and the first thing her husband says to her is "what's for dinner?" Hopeless—everything is hopeless.

Whatever it was that led Elijah to that point really doesn't matter—the point is that he was desperate and disappointed. The point is that he was at the point of giving up. He concluded that everything was hopeless and he just wanted to die. But that was precisely the exact moment when Elijah was most ready to receive God's help. And you know what? Time and time again God takes us there too. God takes us to the point where we realize that we have nothing left. He takes us to the point where we finally begin to admit that everything is hopeless, and that is the exact moment when we too are most ready to receive God's help. Neither his failures nor his fears nor any of his sins had caused Elijah now to step outside the sphere of God's love or would take away his call to be a prophet. God's help would now come to him in the most remarkable way.

"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" (1 Kings 19:15-16). Elijah had nowhere to go but to God, and when he did, then he realized that God was there with his help all along. And you know what? The same thing happens to you and me. We may not always see God's help, but it's there. It may come to us from a surprising source. It may come from the

calming lips of a little child who says, “Don’t worry mommy. God will protect us.” It might come from the phone call that you receive out of the blue from a friend that you haven’t talked to in years who is calling just to check up on you. But that is exactly the moment that you needed someone to listen. It might come in a sermon or a Bible study that is talking about a subject that you needed to hear at that exact time and moment. Getting help is not a matter of searching and striving. It’s a matter of giving up and going to God. And when we do, we find out that God promises to be there all the time.

Recently, I myself needed that reminder, and a friend sent me this story. There is a man who was asleep in his cabin one night when all of a sudden this light just filled the entire cabin and the Lord appeared. And the Lord told the man that he now had a job for him to do. And he took this man outside and he showed him this huge rock that the Lord had placed outside of his cabin. And he told the man that it was now his job to push against that rock with all his strength. And so he did. Day after day, for many years, from sun up until sun down, that man set his shoulders squarely against the cold massive surface of unmoving rock, pushing with all his might. Then every night the man would come home from work tired and worn out and actually depressed because he felt like the entire day was a loss. Everything had been done in vain. He hadn’t been able to move the rock. So he became discouraged.

That’s when Satan began to put thoughts into his weary mind. Satan said to him, “Why are you pushing against this rock? It hasn’t moved. And by the way, it’s not going to move. So why are you killing yourself over this? All you really need to do is put in the bare minimum and that should just be enough.” And so, that is exactly what the weary man thought. But he decided to make it a matter of prayer and he took all of his troubled thoughts to God and he prayed, “Lord, I have been doing everything that you told me to do. I have been pushing with all my strength, but I haven’t been able to move that rock even half a millimeter. So what is wrong Lord? Why am I failing?” That is when the Lord responded with great compassion. He said, “My friend, when I called you into service, I told you that you were to push against that rock with all your strength. That you have done. However, never once did I mention that I expected you to move it. Your task was to push. Now you have come to me thinking that you are a failure, but is that really so? Take an honest look at yourself. Your arms, your back, your legs are strong and muscular. Your hands are callused from constant pushing. Yes, it’s true. You haven’t moved the rock, but your task was to be obedient, to push and to exercise your faith. That you have done, and so now I will move the rock.”

The point being is that when everything seems hopeless, just push. When work is just so stressful, just push. When your money is running out and the bills are piling up, just push. Whatever the obstacle might be, the point is just push—that is PRAY until something happens.

How many times don’t we miss out on God’s blessings because they don’t come packaged the way that we expected them to be? Yet, God’s help is always near. He has never failed us even though we fail him all the time. That is why it is so important that we give up trying to earn God’s help. The only thing to do now if we really want help is we have to go to God. What in the world have we ever done that would have caused Jesus to give up his life in our place? Nothing! Absolutely nothing! The

blessings that we really need, forgiveness of sins, new life and salvation, those blessings are made ours by Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ alone. It was the apostle John who put it this way. He said, "When we confess our sins," in other words when we are finally ready to give up, "God is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."

Elijah had asked to die because he felt all alone. He felt as if everything was hopeless. But he wasn't alone and he wasn't done. By anointing the new kings of Israel and Aram and by anointing Elisha to succeed him as prophet, God was putting the right men in place who would now wipe out the wicked Ahab dynasty and would remove Baal worship in all of Israel. But then the Lord told him, "*I reserve seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal*" (1 Kings 19:18). It wasn't time for Elijah to die. It was time to go on.

What we need to do is this—when we begin to think as if everything is hopeless, we also need to go to God. We need to get into his Word. We need to hear again and again what it is that he has done for you. You and I, we need to hear about how he has promised to never leave us nor forsake us. He has promised to be by our side every step of the way. When we go to God, he enables us to go on. How else in the world could we deal with all the obstacles that come our way?

Now I know that there have been times when you have felt small, insecure, lost and alone. And I know that there have been times and continue to be times when you feel as if everything is hopeless. Maybe work is stressing you out. Maybe your health isn't the best or maybe your relationships have fallen apart. Whatever the case may be when everything to you seems hopeless, you need to go to God. You need to take all these cares, these worries, these concerns and you pick them up and you take them to Calvary's Cross and you leave them there. Then, you go on.

There is an old saying that the Lord allows us to stumble so that we might fall into his arms. Oh Lord, into your hands we commit our spirits!