



Elijah on Mount Horeb by Daniele, da Volterra (1509-1566)

This morning we hear about the healing of the Demoniac from the Gerasenes, the region on the northeastern border of Israel. This is the man whom Jesus healed from the possession of a legion of demons, these demons who then took up residence in the heard of pigs. I love the way Wendell Estep of First Baptist Church, Columbia preaches on this passage. After dramatically recounting how this heard of demon-possessed pigs madly dashed down the hillside to drown themselves in the Sea of Galilee, Pastor Estep will solemnly gaze out at the congregation from his place at the pulpit and then tell everybody, “And that, brothers and sisters, is how they invented devilled ham!” ☺

I don’t know if you noticed in the Old Testament reading from 1st Kings, but the revelation of God’s presence to the Prophet Elijah begins with a question. And that question is found twice in this reading. It happens when God asks, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” (See 1Ki.19:9) It’s a good question. You see, Elijah is angry with God. He has been faithful, has Elijah. He has committed his whole life to service to the Lord Jehovah. And what does he have to show for it? He is a fugitive; there is a price on his head; all his fellow priests have been slain by the wicked couple of King Ahab and Queen Jezebel so that Elijah has been left completely alone, isolated, and on the run; he’s just marched 40 days through the desert to arrive at this final redoubt on God’s Holy Mountain which we read is named “Horeb”; he’s having to live rough in a cave with no form of comfort or provision. In short Elijah is fed up with God, he’s angry, embittered, and he’s just **had it**? So God asks him, “Well, Elijah, exactly what are you doing here?”

So God makes Elijah confront his anger. He makes Elijah stand in the mouth of a cave. What you may not have realized is that this mountain which in Elijah’s time was called “Horeb” was the same mountain that the children of Israel called “Sinai.” So this cave entrance was almost certainly the same cleft in the rock where God made Moses stand in order to witness the glory of God passing by him – God made Moses stand protected by this cleft in the rocky face of Mt. Sinai so that Moses would not be totally destroyed at the awesome glory of God. (See Ex.33:18-23)

And once again God makes his prophet stand in the protection of this rocky cliff on God’s holy mountain while he puts on parade the spectacle of His glory. But this time, God’s glory is manifest with a remarkable difference. First there is the awesomeness of God’s might, demonstrated by a raging fire, trembling, earth and a wind so strong it could split mountains. But then the presence of The Lord, the real substance of the Holy One of Israel is actually made manifest with an infinite silence. That is the presence of The Lord, this quiet stillness. And then the still, small voice comes to Elijah in a whisper and asks the prophet a second time, “And now, tell me, what are you doing here, Elijah?” (See 1Ki.19:13)

Isn’t it amazing that after wind, earthquake, and fire God shows himself in all His glory...through a whisper. It is in the quiet gentleness of things that you and I will find the true presence of The Lord. And it will be this quiet gentleness, a meekness of devotion; it will be, in the end, through humble submission, even perfect submission of His perfect self to a horrible sacrifice by which The Lord God will win eternity for the likes of you and me.

In the end of Chapter 3 of Galatians which is the Epistle for today, Paul sets forth probably for the first time in his epistles the immense blessing of Christian faith. But Paul also forewarns us in this chapter that in order to truly recognize and receive this faith, we must first be introduced to the crushing weight and futility of the law. In fact, Paul calls this life according the law, man's "disciplinarian" (see 1Gal.3:24), something designed to prepare us for the full blessing of freedom to be had in our faith in Christ. But surely this means that such redeeming freedom can only be fully recognized after we've gone through that crucible which is the pain and challenge of this world. Apparently, to really see the beauty of Christ, sooner or later you and I must first go through the furnace, and deal with all the "stuff" of this worldly world.



Christ Healing the Blind by El Greco (1540-1614)

Did you notice that the same question Elijah was asked twice by the Lord God, this same question is asked once again in the Gospel reading of today? When the demons possessing this wretched man recognize who it is that's coming toward them on that hillside by the lake, they ask, "What are you doing here, Jesus?" (see Lk.8:28). Can you imagine how much this wretched man had had to suffer? But finally he comes to that place of amazing peace. And rather than the raving voices of destruction, he hears the gentle voice of God. Finally he dwells in the quietness of healing peace. God has dealt with his brokenness, even used that brokenness to make this man an instrument of God's peace. And we are told that from that moment forward, this man went throughout his community telling anyone who would listen to him what God had done in his life. (See Lk.8:39).

So, have you dealt with the question, "What are you doing here?" Have you walked through the furnace of this life? Have you grown weary of the consuming fires of this world, fires it seems that we are continually trying to put out during the innumerable crisis moments of our days? Are you tired of the shaking foundations of this life, things that seem to be always changing, never constant or dependable, the plans and designs of this world which forever seem to be sliding out of our control? Have you had it with those stormy winds which always seem to blow through at exactly the wrong moment, upsetting so much of what you hold dear?

Because I know a peace that never fails. I've met someone who speaks the ever gentle voice of love and encouragement, regardless of what you've done or where you are. His is always the shining face of love, no matter what your brokenness might be. In fact I know one who will even use your brokenness to pour the richness of his love into your life and through you, into the lives of others.

Have you grappled with the question yet? What are you doing here? How is God going to use all the things which have tried you and challenged you? Because make no mistake, if you'll only let Him, God will use every last bit of you for His glory. So, what are you doing here in this world, Oh child of God? JWB+ 04/18/16