



Series: In the Waiting

Message: In the Waiting

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Smythe Street Church

40 Days...

March 10th feels so long ago. It has been just 40 days, since March 10th, the day before the first case of COVID-19 was confirmed here in the province of New Brunswick. A sickness that felt a world away landed in our doorstep.

In the matter of days, we in New Brunswick, and all across Canada (and even beyond) began to understand what other parts of the world had already experienced, that this sickness was a serious threat, and that life as we had known it was in for a sudden shock.

In the early days it seemed like there was a new announcement, a new change every other day. No larger gatherings, restrictions on restaurants, school closures, business closures, activity closures, emergency declarations with the simple, firm instructions, “Stay the blazes home.”

Now we wait...

After the flurry of activity and announcements and changes, here we are today, in the land between what was normal, and what comes next and we are waiting. Some of you have lost your jobs, those of us who still have our jobs are working from home, or if you are a frontline worker in healthcare, in the pharmacy, in the grocery store or even in an operating business, none of our work feels the same as it did just 40 days ago. Those of you not in the workforce are tending to children, or missing grandchildren, watching investments, or are alone maybe feeling even more lonely than normal.

And now we wait in a world that has been turned on its head in a way none of us would have expected.

So what would God say to us when we are stuck waiting?

While we are all waiting around, coming face to face with the realities we may not be prepared for, does God say anything to us? How can we deal with the feelings and uncertainties we all are experiencing today?

The Bible is a book that is very real

As I was praying about what we would talk about today, I felt led to look at a story about a prophet named Elijah, which can be found in the book of 1 Kings 19.

If you have a Bible with you at home, I'd encourage you to open up to it with me, again in 1 Kings 19. While some of you turn there, I just really want to encourage you, if you've not thought of reading the Bible before, that you should give it a shot. I'd even encourage you to read the whole story of Elijah. I won't have time to cover it all today, reading 1 Kings 17 through 19 is a great way to look at much of Elijah's life.

Some Background to setup where we find Elijah

In 1 Kings 18, Elijah has returned to Israel after 3 years of drought, a drought that Elijah had told the King of Israel that God was sending because the king was evil. The king is very angry and has been searching for Elijah for these 3 years.

Elijah turns up in town. He convinces Ahab the king to get all the 450 prophets of Baal to meet him on Mt. Carmel for a showdown in front of the people of Israel.

Elijah tells everyone we should settle things once and for all, if Baal is the real god you should serve him, but if the LORD God of Israel is God, we should serve him.

The challenge was to put a bull on an altar. If fire came to consume it, it proved who was the God.

Being polite, Elijah lets team Baal go first. It doesn't go well for them.

1 Kings 18:27–28 (NIV84)

27 At noon Elijah began to taunt them. "Shout louder!" he said. "Surely he is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or traveling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened." 28 So they shouted louder and slashed themselves with swords and spears, as was their custom, until their blood flowed.

Nothing happened for them.

1 Kings 18:38–39 (NIV84)

Then the fire of the LORD fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench.

When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, “The LORD—he is God! The LORD—he is God!”

Then they rounded up the prophets of Baal and executed them for leading the people astray.

The Drought Ends

The entire nation is devoting themselves to follow the LORD, and that’s not all.

Elijah that same day has word sent to Ahab that the rain is coming, and true to the word God gave him, the sky grew black and a heavy rain came (v. 45), ending 3 years of drought for the nation.

Let’s Pause the Story Here for Just One Minute

If I were Elijah, I think I would call that a pretty successful day at the office. You would think he would feel very strong and excited.

Something Shifts as we get to Chapter 19

Ahab gets home and tells his wife, Jezebel, who is really fond of Baal and was personally invested in the 450 priests of Baal that were executed just a few verses above. She is peeved,

1 Kings 19:2–5a (NIV84)

2 So Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah to say, “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.”

3 Elijah was afraid and ran for his life.

While we may have expected that Elijah would be on cloud nine after his powerful experience that day, something else was going on.

He was Afraid,

You would wonder who would touch him with a 10-foot pole after the day he had, but his fear leads him to run.

He Was Depleted and Depressed

1 Kings 19:4 (NIV84)

He came to a broom tree, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. "I have had enough, LORD," he said. "Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors."

I want to pause for a minute here, so we don't fly past this. Sometimes I hear well-meaning Christians say that if you have true faith in God you will not be afraid, discouraged, you will not experience depression, and there is no way that someone who has faith in God could ever feel suicidal.

This is why I find it so important to honestly sit and listen to the stories in Scripture, because they are refreshingly real. Elijah, the great prophet of God, who had just hours before witnessed one of the greatest miracles in the history of Israel, was so discouraged that he was begging God to let him die.

If today you are in a place where you are overwhelmed, where you feel like the walls are closing in, where you feeling dark and depressed, even suicidal, I am here to tell you today, you are not written off by God, and it does not mean that you are without faith.

Scripture and church history tell us of giants of the faith who struggled with moments of deep darkness. I have met people who sincerely love Jesus who have battled with suicide and depression. Here's what I would say to you today, that you should note God's reaction to Elijah, he sends his angel and says:

1 Kings 19:5b (NIV84)

All at once an angel touched him and said, "Get up and eat."

God sends him food and drink to renew him, and then Elijah goes to Mt. Horeb (which is also known as Mt. Saini where Moses met God in the burning bush).

WHEN ELIJAH WAS AFRAID AND WEAK, GOD DID NOT CONDEMN HIM.
GOD SUSTAINED ELIJAH, UNTIL HE COULD HEAR GOD'S VOICE.

That's for you today, perhaps you are in a place where you don't see faith as being worth it, or life as being worth it. God is there ready to meet you.¹

Elijah didn't get his answer yet, he was on a 40-day journey. Things were not solved yet, but God was there.

Elijah Arrives at Mt. Horeb

Now this is the same mountain where Moses climbed up and saw a vision of the LORD God, receiving the 10 Commandments.

- God asks Elijah, "What Are You Doing Here?" 19:9b

1 Kings 19:10 (NIV84)

10 He replied, "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."

God doesn't really question what Elijah says, but invites Elijah to come to the mouth of the cave.

- At the Mouth of the Cave
 - Wind that broke rocks (God not in it)
 - Earthquake (God not in it)
 - Fire (God not in it)

¹ If you are experiencing suicidal thoughts, do not hesitate to seek help. There are people willing to help. One resource is Chimo Helpline, visit <http://www.chimohelpline.ca/> or call 1-800-667-5005.

Before I go any further, these were ways that God had shown up before to Israel, even how one might expect God to show up at this mountain. In the story of God's people, God had shaken this mountain in the times of Moses, God had led the people by a pillar of cloud, and a column of fire. But God was not working in those things.

When we are in crisis, it is rarely the extraordinary outward things that renew us.

God was in the whisper.

IN THE TIME OF CRISIS, IT IS THE QUIET VOICE OF GOD THAT RENEWS AND SUSTAINS US.

PASTOR CHAD'S THOUGHT:

I FIND THAT I HAVE STRUGGLED WITH KEEPING MYSELF BUSY WITH ACTIVITY THAT IS NOT FULFILLING. TAKING TIME TO READ SOME PASSAGES OF SCRIPTURE AND BE STILL TO HEAR GOD'S VOICE HAS BEEN REALLY HELPFUL TO ME.

A PRACTICE I HAVE USED BEFORE AND AM USING AGAIN TO GUIDE MY READING IS USING A LECTIONARY. IT IS A COLLECTION OF READINGS FOR EACH DAY OF THE YEAR. OFTEN IT HAS PSALM, OLD TESTAMENT READING, NEW TESTAMENT AND GOSPEL SELECTIONS.

HERE IS ARE A COUPLE ONLINE LECTIONARIES YOU COULD USE IN DEVOTIONS:

REVISED COMMON LECTIONARY - <https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu>

BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER -

https://www.bookofcommonprayer.net/#/daily_office/archive

What Does the Whisper Say?

God asks again, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" – v. 13b

Elijah gives the same answer (v. 14) **"I am the only one"**

Sometimes we feel like we are the only one left.

- At work
- School
- Family

We think we are alone, the struggle is not worth it, it isn't working.

1 Kings 19:18 (NIV84)

18 Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and all whose mouths have not kissed him.”

God shows Elijah that he wasn't alone, that while he was worried and seeing only his world, **God was working around Elijah where he could not see.** God also gave him the confidence to return back into his purpose.

When we feel alone, God is still working around us, and stays with us

As we close I have a question for you: When was God with Elijah?

He was with him at all three spots: Mt Carmel (where his miracle was), when he wanted to die, when he was discouraged in the cave.

Life and faith in God do not mean that you will be without struggle. Some would assert we go from victory to victory, that if you are discouraged that you have a problem, that your faith is weak, but I'm here to tell you if you look at the lives of the saints, we all walk through valleys.

But God does not leave us alone in our valleys, and in time he will lead us back to a place of life.

As Jesus finished his earthly ministry, he gave his followers a promise:

Matthew 28:20 (NIV)

“I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Before the team comes back to lead us one more worship song, I will close in prayer, but I would encourage you now; if you would like prayer, we have our pastors ready to pray with you right now.

You can call or text us at 1-800-601-0981 or send an email to prayer@ssc.church

We will have our pastors there for the next while. **LET US PRAY...**