

Scripture and Reflection for Sunday, 9 August 2020

The 9th Sunday after Trinity

Greetings!

Greetings to you all! I am a priest serving Good Samaritan Episcopal Parish near Seattle, Washington and delighted to share some of the Scripture passages appointed for today along with a brief reflection. I was scheduled to be serving in the Anglican Chaplaincy in Santiago de Compostela this week and next, but the pandemic made it impossible for me to be there in person this year. God willing, my colleagues and I will be welcoming pilgrims and celebrating the Sacraments in person in Santiago next summer.

If you are reading this while walking the Way of St. James, visiting in Santiago, just happened to see this post or follow this Facebook page on a regular basis, I invite you to open your heart and mind to hear what God might be saying to you in the prayers, readings, and reflection. You'll find additional resources at the end of the post that you can check out, too.

Wherever you are on your journey, Buen Camino!

Steve+

Preparation

Take a few moments to quiet your mind, take a few deep breaths and invite God's presence.

Opening Acclamation: Blessed be God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And blessed be God's Kingdom, now and forever. Amen.

Collect for the Day

Grant to us, Lord, we pray, the spirit to think and do always those things that are right, that we, who cannot exist without you, may by you be enabled to live according to your will; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

A Reading from the Old Testament (1 Kings 19)

At Horeb, the mount of God, Elijah came to a cave, and spent the night there. Then the word of the Lord came to him, saying, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" He answered, "I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away."

He said, "Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by."



Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave.

Then there came a voice to him that said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" He answered, "I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away." Then the Lord said to him, "Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus; when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael as king over Aram. Also you shall anoint Jehu son of Nimshi as king over Israel; and you shall anoint Elisha son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah as prophet in your place. Whoever escapes from the sword of Hazael, Jehu shall kill; and whoever escapes from the sword of Jehu, Elisha shall kill. Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him."

The Gospel (Matthew 14:22-23)

Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea. But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."

Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

Reflection



Fear is a powerful emotion. Fear can make us do things we'd not ordinarily do, say things we'd never think of saying under normal circumstances. In the reading from 1 Kings, Elijah is running for his life. The king and queen of Israel are furious with Elijah because he has spoken truth to their abuse of power. A hunting party has been sent out to find Elijah and bring him back to face the wrath of the royal court. Elijah, who heretofore has been quite bold and fearless in his words and actions, decides he's had enough. He runs away as fast as his legs can carry him and finds a cave on Mt. Horeb in which to hide. Elijah does what many of us do when we are afraid. We run. We

hide. We withdraw. We may feel alone, or even sorry for ourselves.

Peter, on the other hand, expresses his fear in a very different way: bravado. Notice that the storm is still raging and the disciples are terrified because they believe the figure walking toward them on the water is a ghost. Peter, ever impetuous, puts on a brave face. It's almost as though he is itching for a fight with the storm or trying to prove himself to Jesus. Peter does what many of us do when we are faced with overwhelming circumstances. We hide our fear under a thin layer of bravado. We convince ourselves that we really don't need God's help or anyone else's, for that matter.

The common thread that ties these two stories together is the action of God. God comes to Elijah in the silence. Jesus comes to the disciples and Peter in the most extraordinary way—walking on water. Some might say that the latter way is the better way. After all, it's a miracle and it does grab one's attention. I'm not so sure. I find that more often than not God comes to us the smallest and most hidden ways. A kind word from a friend, the touch of a loved one, in the voice of a child, or a song that brings us to tears.

Whether we experience the presence of God in a dramatic way or a more subtle way, the God we know in Jesus is the God who chooses to come to us, to be present and known to us, to invade our little space on this earth with the very air of heaven. In fact, that understanding of God is the cornerstone of the Christian faith. Christians sometimes use the name "Emmanuel" to refer to Jesus. "Emmanuel" means "God with us." In Jesus and His abiding presence we know as the Spirit, God is always coming to us, always with us, especially when we are afraid.

To say that we are living in unusual and uncertain times is an understatement. In my country, the United States, the pandemic is raging once again throughout the nation. We're divided by racial strife and political division. I've not lived through anything like this, and truth be told, sometimes it is scary.

I think the lesson to be learned from these two Bible stories is that no matter where we are and no matter the circumstances in which we find ourselves, God is always present with us. And God's presence is never passive, but always active, always engaging, always inviting. Our job is to cultivate an openness to God so that we learn to hear

God's voice when it's just a whisper or see God's hand at work in unusual circumstances.

Notice, too, that God reminded Elijah that he was not alone in his commitment to be faithful to God. Peter, too, was not alone on the lake; his friends were with him and probably helped him climb back into the boat!

The good news—the gospel—is that no matter our circumstances or the depth of our fear, God's abiding presence is always with us. And, who knows who God will place in your path to walk as a companion on the journey?!

At this moment, what is your greatest fear? How does that fear express itself in your day-to-day life? Who has God put into your life—a friend, a community of faith, a fellow pilgrim—to encourage you or be encouraged by you?

Blessing

The peace of God which passes all understanding calm your fears and keep your hearts and minds anchored in the love and knowledge of God, and of God's Son, Jesus Christ. The blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit + be with you and remain with you forever. Amen.

Additional Resources

For children (or adults!) here is a video based on the Gospel reading for the day:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D0m3DocgFkM>

This webpage has information about the life of Elijah and images of artwork and Elijah's cave:

<https://kids.kiddle.co/Elijah>