

Elijah is bummed out, burned out, and at the end of his rope. He has done his best, he has proven to everyone that God is in charge of the world, not humans, and what he gets for all his trouble is a death sentence from the queen, Jezebel. I guess along the way to proving that God is in charge Elijah killed a bunch of Jezebel's prophets and did not sit well with her. But the way of a prophet has always been difficult. Speaking the truth in love is not their forte. And over the next few weeks we are going to meet, or be reacquainted with, a few of the Hebrew Scripture prophets.

The characteristics of a prophet are these: They are called by God, but don't necessarily feel like answering at first. They become God's conduit for the message God wants to deliver, but that does not generally earn them any love or respect. And, they often reach a breaking point where he (or dare I say she) doesn't think that they can go on any further. They have been pushed to their limit.

It's the human experience and we share it too, but maybe not on such a grand scale. We too are called by God. We too sometimes have to say difficult things that are not well received, and we too sometimes reach a point where we have to say "Uncle." We can't go on without some sort of radical change or break.

I'm no prophet. But I am a human being who tries to listen and be faithful to God. You all supported me so incredibly when I reached a breaking point back in 2014 and felt that I must walk out of my home of 33 years and take time to reassess my life, and my 40 year marriage. I am no prophet, but I heard God's call to seek wholeness and health from a number of respected people including our Bishop.

When have been those points in your life for you? With an illness, a job, a relationship, or a death. And what did you do to take a step back, take a breather, and take a different tack?

We love the prophets because we can see that they struggle like we do. They want to hear God's voice clearly and try to determine that they are on the right path, like we do. And so when we hear that Elijah, who before this point was so strong, and sure of himself, and brave in the face of opposition, finally just can't do it anymore and runs away. we can see better than he can, "Oh, he thinks he's alone. And I have felt that way too."

So, it is comforting to know that when Elijah goes to Mt. Horeb and spends time in quiet solitude, God shows up to listen to him and encourage him. Elijah must take the time to pour out his heart and his troubles to God and God did not thunder at Elijah. But God begins to set him back on the path by asking him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

God then shows up if we take the time to go to our own Mt Horeb. If we listen for sheer silence, a soft whisper and a still small voice (ways in which the obscure Hebrew phrase has been translated in various versions of Scripture) we will hear it. And we can't hear God if we keep drowning out that whisper with our own flood of words. So at some point Elijah must stop talking and listen. So do we all.

And then we are told to return. God tells Elijah to return to Damascus and he is given some specific tasks to accomplish. One of them is to find his successor, Elisha, and throw the mantle on him. We'll hear more about that next week.

The point of the retreat, Elijah's retreat to Mt. Horeb, or our own retreat is to regain our bearings, regain our confidence and our ability to think straight.

Compare Elijah's experience with God to the story we heard from the Gospel of Luke about Jesus and the Gerasene demoniac. The poor man was beyond human help as possessed as he was by a legion of demons.

Jesus heals this outcast from society and throws the whole of his town into an uproar. The residents of the town did not really want this fellow back on the streets. Could they trust that he would stay healed? Mighten he go off the rails again? And what about the poor pig farmer who lost all this inventory. The people ask Jesus to leave. Understandably. He has completely upset the status quo.

And as for the healed man, he is so thankful for having his life back that he wants to follow Jesus with the disciples. He must have felt there was no real reason to stay in the town that didn't welcome him back. But Jesus tells him to return. He has work to do there to tell people about the Good News and create, perhaps, the first group of Gentile Christians in Palestine.

God tells Elijah to return and get to work. Jesus tells the healed man to return and get to work.

We've been hearing John's Gospel of the mystical Christ for many weeks now, and here we are placed back in the realm of the Gospel of Luke, a great storyteller.

Remember one of the great themes of John's Gospel; God is in Jesus and God is in us. That still small voice, the sound of sheer silence, is right within our own hearts telling you and me that we need to take time to recoup and to heal, and then we need to return.

When we've taken time, when we've been healed, when we've had a respite and have been fed, then there's work for us to do. Let's take time this morning for the respite and the holy meal, and then let's return and get to work.