

Opening Prayer

Lord, open our hearts and minds by the power of your Holy Spirit that, as the Scriptures are read and discussed, we may hear with joy what you say to us today. Amen.

1 Kings 19:1-15a

^{19:1} Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. ² Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "So may the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life like the life of one of them by this time tomorrow." ³ Then he was afraid; he got up and fled for his life, and came to Beer-sheba, which belongs to Judah; he left his servant there. ⁴ But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a solitary broom tree. He asked that he might die: "It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life, for I am no better than my ancestors." ⁵ Then he lay down under the broom tree and fell asleep. Suddenly an angel touched him and said to him, "Get up and eat." ⁶ He looked, and there at his head was a cake baked on hot stones, and a jar of water. He ate and drank, and lay down again. ⁷ The angel of the LORD came a second time, touched him, and said, "Get up and eat, otherwise the journey will be too much for you." ⁸ He got up, and ate and drank; then he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God. ⁹ At that place he 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?" ¹⁰ 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." ¹¹ 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; ¹² and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. ¹³ 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?" ¹⁴ 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." ^{15a} Then the LORD said to him, "Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus.

Commentary

Elijah was a prophet of God who lived in the 800's B.C. during the reign of King Ahab in Israel. Centuries later, the narrator of Kings retold long-existing Elijah stories, including a report of Ahab's failures to obey God. This passage is the end of one such story. A drought descended on the areana; and Elijah, who insisted that to be faithful to Israel must worship God alone, proclaimed that this was the year of God's punishment on Israel for practicing this idolatry. Elijah challenged Ba'al's prophets to a duel that would prove God's ultimate power and ordered the death of the prophets among many other signs. When Jezebel learned that her prophets were dead, she threatened to kill Elijah. He was directed to a cave to wait for God to "pass by," and while he was waiting, a rainstorm, fire and earthquake all took place, though God was not in any of these signs. Elijah heard God in the hush that followed these tumultuous acts of nature.

Reflection

Elijah expected a dazzling act of God, but instead was told to return and go about his ordinary business. How do you experience God at work in your daily life? Does it take spectacular intervention to make you aware of God's presence, or do you sense God's purpose and power moving more in everyday events?

Galatians 3:23-29

^{3:23} Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. ²⁴ Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵ But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, ²⁶ for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. ²⁷ As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸ There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.

Commentary

When law-abiding Jews became disciples of Christ, they struggled to understand the place of law in their new lives. Some of Paul's fellow Jewish Christians believed they should continue following the law and argued that Gentiles who became Christian must begin to follow it, as well. Paul did not discourage Jews from their religious observance but argued that Gentile Christians need not come to Christianity by way of Jewish law. All persons, Paul argued, are justified (brought into right relationship with God) by God's grace received through faith.

Reflection

What other categories might you add to Paul's words that Jesus breaks open wide?

Luke 8:26-39

^{8:26} Then they arrived at the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. ²⁷ As he stepped out on land, a man of the city who had demons met him. For a long time he had worn no clothes, and he did not live in a house but in the tombs. ²⁸ When he saw Jesus, he fell down before him and shouted at the top of his voice, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me" – ²⁹ for Jesus had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. (For many times it had seized him; he was kept under guard and bound with chains and shackles, but he would break the bonds and be driven by the demon into the wilds.) ³⁰ Jesus then asked him, "What is your name?" He said, "Legion"; for many demons had entered him. ³¹ They begged him not to order them to go back into the abyss. ³² Now there on the hillside a large herd of swine was feeding; and the demons begged Jesus to let them enter these. So he gave them permission. ³³ Then the demons came out of the man and entered the swine, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned. ³⁴ When the swineherds saw what had happened, they ran off and told it in the city and in the country. ³⁵ Then people came out to see what had happened, and when they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind. And they were afraid. ³⁶ Those who had seen it told them how the one who had been possessed by demons had been healed. ³⁷ Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them; for they were seized with great fear. So he got into the boat and returned. ³⁸ The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him; but Jesus sent him away, saying, ³⁹ "Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you." So he went away, proclaiming throughout the city how much Jesus had done for him.

Commentary

When Jesus stilled a raging storm, the disciples asked, "Who then is this, that He commands even the winds and the water?" Today's passage implies a similar question: "Who is this person that casts out demons?" The question is not voiced, but is buried beneath the people's fear. Just as they had ostracized the man that was filled with demons, so they sent away the one who had healed him. They did not recognize God's power at work in Jesus. This story is significant in that it is Luke's only story of Jesus' ministry beyond Jewish territory. It foreshadows the Christian mission to the Gentile world that would begin after Jesus' death.

Reflection

How do you tend to respond to unusual or awesome events — with doubt and suspicion, or with openness to see signs of God at work in new ways? Give an example of how you responded to someone who has done or said things in ways that are new and different.

Responsive Psalter

Psalm 42

^{42:1} As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God.

² **My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.**

When shall I come and behold the face of God?

³ My tears have been my food day and night,
while people say to me continually, "Where is your God?"

⁴ **These things I remember, as I pour out my soul:**

**how I went with the throng, and led them in procession to the house of God,
with glad shouts and songs of thanksgiving, a multitude keeping festival.**

⁵ Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me?
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my help and my God.

⁶ My soul is cast down within me; therefore I remember you
from the land of Jordan and of Hermon, from Mount Mizar.

⁷ **Deep calls to deep at the thunder of your cataracts;
all your waves and your billows have gone over me.**

⁸ By day the LORD commands his steadfast love, and at night his song is with me, a
prayer to the God of my life.

⁹ **I say to God, my rock, "Why have you forgotten me?
Why must I walk about mournfully because the enemy oppresses me?"**

¹⁰ As with a deadly wound in my body, my adversaries taunt me,
while they say to me continually, "Where is your God?"

¹¹ Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me?
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my help and my God.

Closing Prayer

**Grant, O Lord, that what we have said with our lips we may believe in our hearts, and that
what we believe in our hearts we may practice in our lives, through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.**