

Gaines Congregational United Church of Christ

June 19, 2016 Father's Day

Old Testament Lesson 1st Kings 19: 1-15a

Responsive Reading Psalm 22: 19-31

Epistle Galatians 3: 23-29

Gospel Luke 8: 26-39

Sermon Title ELIJAH, WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?

By Rev. James A. Gardner

“You fight like a champion and you let down your guard and from out of nowhere life hits you hard. You are down on the canvas and you don't feel so tough, but you are never a loser until you stop getting up.” This is from a song written by Dean Miller, the son of Roger Miller.

Elijah was one God's greatest prophets. With God doing the work, Elijah has just pulled off the most spectacular miracle since Moses. He had just challenged spineless Ahab to a showdown of prophets to decide who was really God.

The 450 prophets of Baal were given an ox to sacrifice and Elijah was also given an ox. They were each to prepare their ox, and alter, and wood but not to light it. They were each to call

on their God and the God who sent down fire and lit an offering would be recognized as God.

Big, Big win for Elijah and to add an exclamation point Elijah killed the 450 prophets of Baal. Now spineless King Ahab had a vicious and murderess wife named Jezebel.

Jezebel liked Baal and she liked the prophets of Baal. Jezzy sent a message to Elijah saying that he was as good as dead and he would be dead within 24 hours.

Elijah panicked and ran like the wind. Hey God this is not right, I just stood up for you and we really put on a show. I should be sitting pretty but no, I'm running for my life. What gives?

Basically he ran till he dropped. He was ready to give up. He asked God to just take his life because he felt like a total failure.

He passed out and was awakened by an angel that prepared food and water for him. He ate and drank and passed out again.

Again an angel made food and water for him and on the strength of that he went 40 days and nights to Mt. Sinai.

Hey if you need some inspiration you can't beat the mountain where Moses got the Ten Commandments.

Now I really love the imagery of the wind and the fire and the earthquake and finally the sheer silence that let Elijah know

that he was in the presence of God, but the lesson here is in the verbal exchange between God and Elijah.

“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.”

To which God basically said, “So, what is your point? Get back to work and head for Damascus.”

A coach or a drill instructor trains their subjects hard but they do not train the athlete or the soldier so they can play Tiddly-winks. They train them for the tough job that they will be facing, whether it be on the front line or the sports arena.

In the commercial for some well-known DWI lawyers the spokesman says, “Everybody thinks they can play in the big leagues, but thinking and doing are two very different things. If you get charged with DWI you do not want a rookie.”

If you take God seriously God will give you some serious training, and then he will stand by your side in everything you attempt to do. If you take God seriously you will not be a rookie when your role for God requires you to be a pro.

The Bible spends 66 books assuring you that God’s got this and has from the beginning.

Abraham moves out in faith. He did that first; we do not have to do it first.

Jacob established the nucleus for God's people, twelve tribes.

Joseph moved them to Egypt so they could increase their numbers and become a great multitude.

Moses moved them out of bondage and gave them God's law to guide them as they grew in God's presence.

God then gave us Jesus and the Holy Spirit so we could now live in and through God as opposed to being herded by God to do what we did not understand to avoid his wrath.

Our Epistle says, "Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed...but now that faith has come we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith....and you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise."

Heirs according to the promise, means that you are brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ and joint heirs to inherit heaven as your own. You are no longer the subjects or prisoners of God but you are to be the hands and feet of Jesus Christ himself.

If you train well you will be well equipped to fulfill your obligation to serve God in a way that glorifies God first.

In our Gospel lesson the man possessed by a legion of demons was a high profile individual known to everyone in the area. He ran around naked, he lived in unused tombs, and when the authorities tried to chain him up he simply broke the chains and returned to the wilderness.

The demons recognized Jesus as the Son of God, which is a whole other sermon. The demons were allowed to go into the pigs, which is a whole other sermon. The pigs all drown and caused financial stress for the owners which is getting closer to the theme of this sermon.

God took a high profile individual and subjected him to a very public and economically stressing miracle. Everybody knew him and everyone was affected by the circumstance. But, God was not training the demon possessed man to play Tiddlywinks or be a bobble head doll sitting at the feet of Jesus nodding his agreement to the Lord's teachings.

Jesus said to the man, "Return to your home and proclaim how much God has done for you."

This man's community was not a Jewish community. This community was not a community of followers of Christ. This community was a place that embraced the raising and eating of pigs.

This community could not ignore the catastrophic event of a thousand pigs running into a lake and drowning. This community could not ignore a man that was a famous wacko.

When this man proclaimed the power of God they could not help but listen because he was one of them. They had no choice but to think seriously about what he said.

God prepared this man to be the tip of the iceberg to start Gentiles thinking of God and Christ in a new way. You might say that God prepared this man to be a voice crying in the wilderness preparing the way for Paul to be the great evangelist to the Gentiles.

Elijah, what are you doing here? Elijah was not being trained to be a bobble head doll, nodding his agreement to the precepts of God. Elijah was being trained to be one of the greatest pre-Christ prophets. In the story of the Transfiguration of Christ the two prophets that appeared with Jesus on the mountain top in front of Peter, James and John were Moses and Elijah.

God said the same thing to Elijah that he says to each one of us. God says, "Don't give up yet. I've got this and I've got you. I got you ready for this and I am with you always even until the end of time. We are a team. We are a family, and we will make a difference. I am the Gipper and you will win it for and with me."

Hallelujah and Amen.