

Sermon: "Soaring in God's Call"

Scripture Readings: 1 Kings 19:1-4, 8-15;
Luke 8:26-39

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Today's Old Testament reading follows the triumphal battle Elijah has with the priests of Baal. With his faith and boldness in the Lord, Elijah tells Israelites and King Ahab to choose between God and Baal. As God's prophet, when Elijah challenges king's Baal priests to an offering showdown, God answers faithfully by sending a fire down to consume the burnt offering prepared by Elijah. After this act of devotion, God continues to mold Elijah for a new call – to anoint a new king over Israel. Here now the story of God's new call for Elijah from 1 Kings 19:1-4, 8-15.

¹Ahab 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."

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 The word of the Lord 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.” ¹⁵ Then the LORD said to him, “Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus;

Today’s gospel reading comes from Luke 8. Luke chapter 8 is one of memorable chapters in the Bible, for it depicts Jesus as a teacher and Messiah. From great teachings of parable of the sower and its explanations to bringing girl back to life, it has a theme that we often forget: Jesus’ authority is over all things; nature, death, and demons. What we remember as the pigs or legion story, let us hear the miracle of Jesus healing a person with unclean spirits.

Luke 8:26-39

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.

Sermon: “Soaring in God’s Call”

Text: 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.” – Luke 8:38-39

Let us pray. Gracious God, you are our Potter and we are your miry clay. Help us to understand your compassion is beyond our comprehension and your loving kindness is better than life. May your Word penetrate and take root deeply in our souls to give us hope and courage to face our today. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be pleasing to you, our Rock and Redeemer. Amen.

Today's Old and New Testament Scripture readings are wonderful text on its own, and often it is preached by its own merit. Today, however, I would like to speak about their similar ending of the story and focus on something that is hard to talk about as a pastor: what do you do when God calls you while you are not at your best? One step further, why do we feel that God has let us down time to time?

Let us start with the story of Elijah from 1 Kings. Elijah has answered God’s call, daring to challenge the king and his kin, Israelites, to turn back to God of their ancestors from the way of Baal. He had risked everything in the name of the Lord and carried out the task. What does he get in return? Nothing but worldly repercussions. He got a death threat from the Queen Jezebel and suddenly the boldness that Elijah once had was no longer with him. He fled to the mountains. His lonely journey into the wilderness and relationship with a solitary tree hints that Elijah might have felt that he was being abandoned by God.

Sometimes God comes into our lives, uninvited, as it happens to a man who lived in Gerasenes, in a land of Gentiles. This man who had demons has accepted his fate and have abandoned any hope, since he lived this way for a long time, without clothes, living out of tombs. Although he was physically free from chains, he was spiritually bound and prisoned by legion of demons. Remember that a legion is a group of three to six thousand men in the Roman army. It was not only him who was convinced that his fate was sealed. The people in the city and in the country knew of his condition and accepted him being the one who lived this way. They all have surrendered to the will of the

unclean spirits. We think as humans or a single person could not dare to challenge a legion of demons, evils, or unclean spirits. With thousands of evils and temptations pulling him in various directions, the sufferer might have thought that God must not have remembered him in his sufferings and that he is not worth saving.

This story is not unfamiliar with many of us. There are times when we feel that as God's heirs that we, too, feel tired and abandoned from our daily trials and temptations. Even when we thought we chose to do what is right by God, there are days that nothing seems to go right. There are also times when we feel like we are going against the current and the stream is taking us further down the river than where we have originally started. There are days when we feel physically powerless to stand up for the challenges before us.

What are we missing or not seeing that is leading us to see the way we do? Jesus promised that he is the way, the truth, and the life. Many times, we take this statement as a road sign to heaven, a faithful moral compass, or as an insurance policy against all the bad deeds or sins we have committed. What we often forget is that Jesus is also our personal guide. Jesus does not simply point the way for us to go, but walks every step with us, even through the darkest valleys. As the famous poem, *footprints in the sand* reminds us that it is God who carries us when we are not able. We are forgetting God's presence is most visible in our weakness. If God who has the power and authority over all things that are with us, who can be against us? According to the Scripture, all Jesus had to do was to stand in front of the legion of demons and they immediately fell down and hailed him supreme, asking what is his command. When the Lord is passing by the mountain of God before Elijah, the wind, the earth, and fire were shaking before God. Are we in awe of the Lord, shaking before our Maker, like the rest of the creation on the earth and in spiritual realm?

For those who have tasted and seen the awesome power and authority of God through God's grace and love are being tasked and commissioned to "return" to the spiritual wilderness. When we feel and experience the grace and love of God in a personal, intimate way, it is the feeling we long for once again. We are touched and healed by the sovereign God where we feel confident, safe, and secure in God's presence. Psalm 84

summarizes it best, saying, “a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than live in the tents of wickedness.”¹ This must be what Elijah and the man who was freed from demons have felt. In fact, the freed man from Luke “begged that he might be with Jesus”² and understandably so. People were afraid of him, not only for the healing that he has received, but also because of a fact that they had to reconcile with the man that they have quit on. Families and friends who allowed this man to run naked, being mocked, and simply turned a blind eye had to ask for forgiveness, and the freed man had the hard task of forgiving them along with sharing how much Jesus had done for him. Why did Jesus sent him away? Why did God make Elijah to go back from his hiding spot on the mountain of God to anoint the next kings of nations?³

God send us out as God’s ambassadors during our weakness because God wants us to soar like the eagles. There is nothing more majestic or powerful like an eagle in the sky and it is fitting to describe our King of Kings as one, as there are many Psalm reference of us hiding in the shadow of God’s wings. What we forget is that we, too, are eagles as an heir to God. I have been told an interesting way a particular eaglets learn to soar and take their first flight: while their nest is built high up on the face of a cliff overlooking the sea, once mother determines they are strong enough, the mother eagle pushes the eaglet off towards the jagged rocks at the bottom of the cliff. As they tumble and fall, the eaglet stretches out its wings instinctively and soar. Of course, the mother eagle is right there to catch them if they do not open their wing. There are many passages of the Bible that refers to us being eagles, my favorite being Isaiah 40:31 – “But those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.” God wants us to experience the authority and power that is given to us as the follower of Christ.

God send us out as God’s ambassadors during our weakness because God is our strength in our weakness. Our experience also tells us that when God is in charge of our lives and guides us, God also provides. During the years of exodus, God guided Israelites with the

¹ Psalm 84:10

² Luke 8:38

³ 1 Kings 19:15-17

pillar of cloud and fire to provide shade from desert sunrays during the day and warmth during the night. God also provided manna and taught people to trust and lean on God for their daily needs. Throughout the years, this truth has not changed. God wants to continue to have the intimate relationship with us, supplying us with the ability to soar in God's call. We do not need to be at our best to do what God is asking for us to do; we simply need to have the faith that God is continuing to call on us to mold and shape us, and ,more importantly, to empower us to be the God's hands and feet. Let us open our wings and soar in God's call to see what God sees from God's side of the sky. Amen.