

Devotions for August 8 – August 14, 2011

Monday, August 8, 2011: Context Daily reading: 1 Kings 18:17-19

Elijah is a prophet during the reign of King Ahab and Queen Jezebel, a Tyrian princess, in the northern kingdom of Israel. Ahab's father, Omri, arranges the marriage to secure access to the lucrative trade port of Tyre, located inside the current border of Lebanon. Jezebel brings public worship of the popular god Baal, and 450 of Baal's prophets. She also brings 400 prophets of Asherah, the mother of the gods. Baal is the god of weather and fertility, often depicted riding on clouds, holding lightning bolts. He is responsible for rain, so in an agrarian society like Israel it's tempting to worship Baal. Is Yahweh the giver of rain, life, and fertility, or is Baal? What gods are present in our culture? Ask God to reveal the gods you try to appease.

Tuesday, August 9, 2011: Conflict Daily reading: 1 Kings 18:20-29

Elijah's version of the story might sound like this: "I told the king to gather the priests and prophets of Baal and the people of Israel on Mount Carmel. There I proposed a challenge. Two altars were built, one for Baal and one for the Lord. We placed an ox and firewood on each altar as an offering. The god bringing fire to the sacrifice would be declared the one true god. More than 800 prophets and priests stood by Baal's altar, and I stood alone. I gave them the chance to call down fire first. All morning they called out to Baal. They danced and shouted, but nothing. By afternoon, I found their efforts so comical that I couldn't resist. I called, "Maybe you're not loud enough. Perhaps Baal is meditating or on vacation. Call louder!" They exhausted themselves, jumping and stomping. They even cut themselves and gave their blood as an offering." Are there times in your life when you test God against other gods to see who is more powerful? Ask God to reassure you of God's power today.

Wednesday, August 10, 2011: Resolution Daily reading: 1 Kings 18:30-40

Elijah's version continues: "Near evening, I took my turn at my altar. I added twelve stones, each representing a tribe of Jacob, to the altar, and dug a wide trench all the way around it. I told people to fill four buckets with water and drench the ox and firewood. They did this three times. So much water was poured on the altar that it filled up the trench. Then I prayed to God to show the people that he is the God of Israel, and I am here to serve him. Through this act, God offers his people a chance at repentance. As I finished praying, fire fell from the sky and burned up the offering. It also burned up the wood, stones, altar, and water in the trench. The people of Israel declared, 'The Lord is our God!' Shortly afterwards, a heavy rain fell upon the land, ending the drought." There is only one true God, and he is the Lord. Ask God to convince you of this today.

Thursday, August 11, 2011: Escape Daily reading: 1 Kings 19:1-8

When Ahab tells Jezebel what's happened, she sends word that killing Elijah has become her top priority. In fear, he flees to Judah, the southern kingdom. Here we see the importance of Elijah's story. Elijah is led to Mount Horeb, where God is first revealed to Moses. There, Moses and Elijah experience fire, wind and an earthquake. Elijah's cave is similar to the cleft where Moses is concealed. God passes by, both avoid looking, both are sent back to their tasks, both complain and ask God to take their lives, both are given other prophets to help them, both are under God's care at their time of death, and both are present on another mountain: Jesus' transfiguration. Ask God to reveal himself to you in new ways today.

Friday, August 12, 2011: Hiding Daily reading: 1 Kings 19:9-18

God asks Elijah a question: "What are you doing here?" Elijah tells God how hard he has worked and how unfaithful the people have become. Jezebel has killed all the prophets, and he is the only one left. But God doesn't directly address Elijah's concerns. God comes to him and invites him out of the cave to witness God's power in the wind, earthquake and fire. Elijah disobeys; he doesn't come out to witness these massive events. But after a time of silence Elijah emerges, wrapping his face in fear because he knows he is about to encounter God. He knows God is there. After all of that, God asks Elijah the same question: "What are you doing here?" Elijah simply repeats his first answer, and again God doesn't address Elijah's concerns. God seems to ignore Elijah's fear. What are you hiding from? Ask God for the strength to come out of your cave.

Saturday, August 13, 2011: Whose Story? Daily reading: 1 Kings 19:19-21

No matter how tempting it is to read this story from Elijah's point of view, this story is not really about Elijah. The only consistent presence in this story is the promise of God. The voice of God comes to Elijah in good times; God protects him, provides for him, proves him right in the eyes of his fellow Israelites and Ahab. In the midst of despair, failure, and fear, God does for Elijah what Elijah can't do for himself: pulls him out of the cave. God refuses to let Elijah go despite his determination to stay in the wilderness. Elijah doesn't choose to come out. For all we know, Elijah would still be in that cave. Can you remember how God has been faithful to you in the past? Ask God to help you have confidence for the future.

Sunday, August 14, 2011: Sin Daily reading: 1 Kings 19:9-18 again

Elijah's sin is denying the promise of God, and that sets him on a path of destruction and despair. That denial is our sin, as well. The overwhelming nature of sin in our lives can only drive us out into the wilderness, into a cave; the end result of sin. We're so good at hiding! We're cave dwellers. We're each hiding from something; that's what sin does. Yet the promise of God is as true for us as it was for Elijah. God will go to great lengths to pull us out of the cave. If earthquakes and fire and wind don't work, God will find something else. We can't hide from God. God is running to us and, on the cross of Jesus Christ, God's promises pull us out of the cave, over and over again, giving us new life, making of us a new creation and sending us back into the world with purpose and hope. Ask God to pull you out of the caves you are hiding in.