

SERMON FOR JUNE 23, 2013

The First Chinese Church of Christ in Hawai'i (UCC)

7:45 & 10:30 Worship Services

Scripture: **1 Kings 19:1-18 (Focus)**; Luke 8:26-39

Message: **"GOD's Spirit Offers Respite & Renewal!"**

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Mt. Carmel where Elijah Confronts the Prophets of Ba'al



Gathering in the Word

French Christian philosopher, Blaise Pascal (French: [blɛz paskal]), wrote these words which are often paraphrased: **“Each of us has an emptiness, a longing, for something beyond us; that something is GOD!”** We learn again and again that **GOD never abandons** (*dumps, ditches, throws away, deserts, walks out on, leaves us behind*) **us!**

Our lesson from 1 Kings 18 and Luke 8 reminds us that when and if we ever feel abandoned and alone—we can share our feelings with GOD without fear of judgment!

Perhaps—there is no greater truth than this!

Hearing the Word

1 Kings 19:1-18 (The VOICE Bible)

¹⁹ ¹ *When Ahab arrived in Jezreel, he told Jezebel about everything that had taken place. He told her how Elijah had executed all the prophets of Baal with a sword, and she became furious.* ² Jezebel sent an *urgent* message to Elijah.

Jezebel’s Message: May the gods kill me and worse, if I haven’t killed you the way you killed their priests by this time tomorrow. *Your end is near, Elijah.*

³ Terrified, Elijah quickly ran for his life. *He traveled the length of Israel in one day* and finally arrived at Beersheba, *the southern point of God’s territory*, which is in Judah. *When he arrived, he instructed his servant to remain there while he sought solitude.*

⁴ He journeyed into the desert for one day and then decided to rest beneath *the limbs* of a broom tree. There he prayed *that his life would be over quickly and that he would die there beneath the tree.*

Elijah: I'm finished, Eternal One. *Please end my life here and now, even though I have failed, and I am no better than my ancestors.*

⁵ Elijah then laid himself down under the broom tree and entered into a *deep* sleep. While he was sleeping, a heavenly messenger came and touched him and gave him instructions.

Messenger: Get up, and eat.

⁶ Elijah looked and found a breadcake sitting over charcoal near his head. There was also a jar of water. He ate *the food* and drank *the water*, and then he lay back down.

Often the only thing growing in the desert, the small broom tree has enough substance to save Elijah. This bush, whose limbs grow straight up like a broom standing on its end, offers meager shade; but its oil-rich branches and roots make excellent fuel and charcoal; the thick roots travel deep into the ground and offer both water and fire. God provides for Elijah's needs—nothing more, and nothing less.

⁷ The Eternal's messenger visited him again, touched him, and gave him more instructions.

Heavenly Messenger: Get up, and eat. Your journey ahead is great, *and you need plenty of nourishment.*

⁸ Elijah got up and ate *the food* and drank *the water*. His body felt strong again, and he journeyed for 40 more days and 40 more nights to Horeb, God's mountain *where Moses received the Ten Directives*. ⁹ When he arrived *at Horeb*, he walked into a cave and rested for the night.

Eternal One (to Elijah): Why are you here, Elijah? *What is it that you desire?*

Elijah: ¹⁰ *As you know, all my passion has been devoted to the Eternal One, the God of heavenly armies. The Israelites have abandoned your covenant with them, they have torn down every single one of your altars, and they have executed by the sword all those who prophesy in your name. I am the last remaining prophet, and they now seek to execute me as well.*

Eternal One: ¹¹ Leave this cave, and go stand on the mountainside in my presence.

The Eternal passed by him. The mighty wind separated the mountains and crumbled every stone before the Eternal. *This was not a divine wind, for the Eternal was not within this wind. After the wind passed through, an earthquake shook the earth. This was not a divine quake, for the Eternal was not within this earthquake.* ¹²⁻¹³ After the earthquake was over, there was a fire. *This was not a divine fire, for the Eternal was not within this fire.*

After the fire *died out*, there was *nothing but* the sound of a calm breeze. *And through this breeze a gentle, quiet voice entered into Elijah's ears. He covered his face with his cloak and went to the mouth of the cave. Suddenly, Elijah was surprised.*

Eternal One: Why are you here, Elijah? *What is it that you desire?*

Elijah: ¹⁴ *As you know, all my passion has been devoted to the Eternal God of heavenly armies. The Israelites have abandoned your covenant with them, they have torn down every one of your altars, and they have executed all who prophesy in your name by the sword. I am the last remaining prophet, and they now seek to execute me as well. They won't stop.*

Eternal One: ¹⁵ Travel back the same way you traveled here, but continue *north* to the desert of Damascus. There, I want you to anoint Hazael as Aram's king, ¹⁶ Jehu (Nimshi's son) as Israel's

king, and Elisha (Shaphat's son from Abel-meholah) to replace you as prophet. ¹⁷ Jehu will execute anyone who escapes from Hazael and Elisha will execute all who escape from Jehu. ¹⁸ I will keep for myself the 7,000 Israelites who have not bowed down to Baal or offered him kisses.

The Prophet Elijah is fresh off one of the most amazing sight-and-sound spectacles and revelation GOD has ever pulled off in the Bible! But this spectacle was not enough as Jezebel again threatened to skin Elijah alive on account of his holy actions! So Elijah flees and runs away. He's so in despair and loses hope that he asks GOD to take his life so that Jezebel won't have a shot at him.

But GOD is patient with his weary and frightened servant Elijah. GOD feeds and nourishes Elijah with the assistance of an angel and gets him to the holy mountain of GOD. There at *Mount Carmel*, Elijah experiences one big spectacle after the next—and yet—Elijah doesn't see GOD in all of this—at least GOD was not speaking. So Elijah hears a whisper, “Psst. Hey buddy, over here” - that Elijah trembles, pulls his coat over this face and listens to the voice he just knows is GOD's!

“What are you doing here, Elijah?”

“Well, I've worked hard but now everybody good is dead and no one ever listens to me.” For his part—GOD then ignores most of what Elijah says and instead—commissions and commands Elijah to go back and anoint a few folks as new leaders.

“Oh, and by the way,” GOD whispers in conclusion, “I've got lost more people on our side than you think—so buck up and get back to work!”

GOD came to Elijah in a whisper and everything is understated and quiet. Yet what GOD accomplishes here and the way that God accomplishes it—is so very, very revealing of GOD’s ways!

- ✓ **GOD always has more going on that we might guess.**
- ✓ **GOD is patient and kind and as often as not—GOD whispers into our lives through the ordinary and simple! Oh—lightning strikes moments may come—and the mountain-top experiences do happen . . .**
- ✓ **But we are to listen for the still small voices, too; because those voices will likely crop up in life more often anyway and what we hear through such whispers may well be truth dearer and more important than whatever comes through the *Mount Carmel moments in our lives!***

A lot of times today—some of us if not all of us are looking for the FLASH or the BRASH or the BOLD-FACE and SPECTACULAR!

But more often—

- ✓ it’s the quiet and unnoticed deeds of aloha and mercy,
- ✓ the cup of cold water offered in Jesus name,
- ✓ the folks who lovingly hold the hand of a dying person or at the hospice who doesn’t have family,
- ✓ or the Christian widow who reaches out to her next-door neighbor via a char-siu bao or a bowl of Chinese noodles because she’s heard that her neighbor is having a hard time,

These are the still-small voices around us that break through and speak to people!

These are the words and deeds that are more likely to make people sense and experience the presence of GOD!

Luke 8:26-39 (The VOICE Bible)

²⁶¹ When they get to the other side of the lake, in the Gerasene country opposite Galilee, ²⁷ a man from the city is waiting for Jesus when He steps out of the boat. The man is full of demonic spirits. He's been running around for a long time stark naked, and he's homeless, sleeping among the dead in a cemetery. ²⁸⁻²⁹ This man has on many occasions been tied up and chained and kept under guard, but each time he has broken free and the demonic power has driven him back into remote places *away from human contact*. Jesus commands the demonic force to leave him. The man looks at Jesus and starts screaming. He falls down in front of Jesus.

Possessed Man (*shouting*): Don't torment me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God! Why are you here?

Jesus (*calmly and simply*): ³⁰ What's your name?

Possessed Man: Battalion.

He says this because an army of demons is inside of him. ³¹ The demons start begging Jesus not to send them into the bottomless pit. ³² They plead instead to enter into a herd of pigs feeding on a steep hillside near the shore. Jesus gives them permission to do so. ³³ Suddenly the man is liberated from the demons, but the pigs—they stampede, squealing down the hill and into the lake where they drown themselves.

³⁴ The pig owners see all this. They run back to their town and tell everyone in the region about it. ³⁵ Soon a crowd rushes from the town to see what's going on out by the lake. There they find Jesus seated *to teach* with the newly liberated man sitting at His feet *learning in the posture of a disciple*. This former madman is now properly dressed and completely sane. This frightens the people. ³⁶ The pig owners tell them the whole story—the healing, *the pigs' mass suicide, everything*.

³⁷ The people are scared to death, and they don't want this scary abnormality happening in their territory. They ask Jesus to leave immediately. *Jesus doesn't argue*. He prepares to leave, ³⁸ but before they embark, the newly liberated man begs to come along and join the band of disciples.

Jesus: ³⁹ No. Go home. Tell your people this amazing story about how much God has done for you.

The man does so. In fact, he tells everyone in the whole city how much Jesus did for him that day *on the shore*.

So what do you suppose the townspeople were so afraid of?

- ✓ Was it the sight of all those dead pigs floating in the water that was washing up on shore?
- ✓ Was it the sight of this nut job of a human being now clothed and in his right mind?
- ✓ Was it the idea that despite the other explanations people had tossed back and forth about over the years about this man – he's quirky, he's angry, he's just not well adjusted?
- ✓ OR was it that there really was a legion and an army of demons in the man after all?
- ✓ Was it the demons that frightened them?
- ✓ Was it the transfer of the army of demons to the pigs that had shown them the truth of the situation and what had been happening to the man all along?

In verse 37, the people are scared and they (as THE VOICE Bible tells it) don't want this scary abnormality happening in their territory!

THEY ASK JESUS TO LEAVE IMMEDIATELY!

- ✓ The people were overcome with fright!

- ✓ The whole thing was shocking and shocking things produce unsettled feelings and emotions including fear!
- ✓ The loss of those pigs probably was going to be a blow to the economy.
- ✓ Interesting—no one from town suggested that this man hit the road!
- ✓ But they asked Jesus and his followers to leave!
- ✓ One of the demons knew and loudly that Jesus was “**the Son of the Most High GOD!**”
- ✓ Jesus had to leave and go so the people could breathe easy again!

What if Jesus showed up at our 7:45/10:30 worship?

- ✓ Would we be unsettled like the people in Luke 8?
- ✓ If Jesus did show up—we might come to see just where and how we are significantly “out-of-alignment” with Jesus—then start going over all our work, our ministries, our programs, etc.

If Jesus were to attend our worship service or our congregational meeting after our 1030 worship—the Son of the Most High GOD could end up shaking up **everything** around our Church—and that would be frightening for most people!

Doing the Word

So what is the Word of God for us?

- 1. ONE: Let’s all quietly love and share mercy with one another; and with our neighbors and with and for the many others around us!**

**Listen and follow GOD’s still small voice!
GOD wants our DEEDS more than our words!**

2. **TWO:** If Jesus did show up at TFCCCH and “shook things up—**JESUS WOULD BRING GRACE TO US!**

3. **THREE:** If Jesus is show up at TFCCCH—let’s abandon our unwillingness to do the hard things that’s needed in making the necessary changes in our behavior and lives—**AND DO THOSE HARD NECESSARY THINGS!**

Sent in the Word

GOD’s heart is great and warm, wide enough to embrace all of us!

Whatever is going on in your life today—GOD offers refreshment – food and rest, and strength for your journey this week! Even when it’s seem that all is crumbling around you—GOD offers the reassurance that we are never alone!

Kyle’s Story

One day, when I was a freshman in high school, I saw a kid from my class was walking home from school. His name was Kyle. It looked like he was carrying all of his books. I thought to myself, 'Why would anyone bring home all his books on a Friday? He must really be a nerd.'

I had quite a weekend planned (parties and a football game with my friends), so I shrugged my shoulders and went on. As I was walking, I saw a bunch of kids running toward him. They ran at him, knocking all his books out of his arms and tripping him so he landed in the dirt. His glasses went flying, and I saw them land in the grass about ten feet from him. He looked up and I saw this terrible sadness in his eyes.

My heart went out to him. So, I jogged over to him as he crawled around looking for his glasses, and I saw a tear in his eye. As I handed him his glasses, I said, 'Those guys are jerks. They really should get lives.' He looked at me and said, 'Hey thanks!'

There was a big smile on his face. It was one of those smiles that showed real gratitude. I helped him pick up his books, and asked him where he lived. As it turned out, he lived near me, so I asked him why I had never seen him before. He said he had gone to private school before now. I would have never hung out with a private school kid before. We talked all the way home, and I carried some of his books. He turned out to be a pretty cool kid.

I asked Kyle if he wanted to play a little football with my friends. He said yes. We hung out all weekend and the more I got to know Kyle, the more I liked him, and my friends thought the same of him. Monday morning came, and there was Kyle with the huge stack of books again. I stopped him and said, 'Boy, you are gonna really build some serious muscles with this pile of books everyday!' He just laughed and handed me half the books.

Over the next four years, Kyle and I became best friends. When we were seniors we began to think about college. Kyle decided on Georgetown and I was going to Duke. I knew that we would always be friends, that the miles would never be a problem. Kyle was going to be a doctor and I was going for business on a football scholarship.

Kyle was valedictorian of our class.

I teased him all the time about being a nerd. He had to prepare a speech for graduation. I was so glad it wasn't me having to get up there and speak. Graduation day, I saw Kyle. He looked great.

He was one of those guys that really found himself during high school. He filled out and actually looked good in glasses. He had more dates than I had and all the girls loved him. Boy, sometimes I was jealous!

Today was one of those days. I could see that he was nervous about his speech. So, I smacked him on the back and said, 'Hey, big guy, you'll be great!' He looked at me with one of those looks (the really grateful one) and smiled. 'Thanks,' he said.

As he started his speech, he cleared his throat, and began. 'Graduation is a time to thank those who helped you make it through those tough years—your parents, your teachers, your siblings, maybe a coach...but mostly your friends.

I am here to tell all of you that being a friend to someone is the best gift you can give them. I am going to tell you a story. I just looked at my friend with disbelief as he told the first day we met. **He had planned to kill himself over the weekend. He talked of how he had cleaned out his locker so his Mom wouldn't have to do it later and was carrying his stuff home.**

He looked hard at me and gave me a little smile. 'Thankfully, I was saved. My friend saved me from doing the unspeakable.' I heard the gasp go through the crowd as this handsome, popular boy told us all about his weakest moment.

I saw his Mom and Dad looking at me and smiling that same grateful smile. Not until that moment did I realize its depth. Never underestimate the power of your actions. With one small gesture you can change a person's life. For better or for worse.

God puts us all in each other's lives to impact one another in some way.

- ✓ Look for God in others.

- ✓ Friends are angels who lift us to our feet when our wings have trouble remembering how to fly.
- ✓ There is no beginning or end...Yesterday is history... Tomorrow is a mystery...Today is a gift!

THANKS BE TO GOD!