

Sunday 20th June 2004, Third Sunday after Pentecost

Readings:

- 1 Kings 19: 1-15a
- Psalm 42 and 43
- Galatians 3: 10-14, 23-29
- Luke 8: 26-39

What are you doing here Elijah?

says the Lord.

what are you doing here??

Sometimes we find ourselves wondering just how we came to be where we are!

Elijah was in such a spot as he fled for his life to Beersheba in Judah.

He was escaping the clutches of Ahab and his wife Jezebel --- they were out to kill him because of his defeat of the prophets of Baal as well as his prediction of famine because of Ahab's crimes.

Ahab embodied all the failures of the kings of Israel.

Today, Elijah is on the run. It seems a few words from Jezebel has him terrified, depressed, and almost suicidal --- or at least --- wishing he would die!

He is in the wilderness and in his depression, he dreams of how God will sustain him for the journey!

I am reminded here of Jesus in the wilderness, speaking about not living by bread alone, but by the word of God.

Sustained by God's provision, Elijah goes to Horeb, the mountain of God, and spends the night.

When God speaks to Elijah, saying:

"What are you doing here?"

Elijah appears very guilty.

I've been zealous for the Lord

and frightened:

*I alone am left and they are seeking my life...
v. 11-12.*

The traditional and well known ways of God's communicating do not this time work:

- WIND
- EARTHQUAKE
- FIRE

This time God speaks in the silence, the stillness --- reminding Elijah (and us too) that God does not always use traditional and expected ways NOR does God need great and powerful events --- NOW God speaks in quietness, silence, stillness.

"The still small voice."

It reminds us that we sometimes need to experience new things --- to change our ways of looking and listening for God.

It also emphasizes the need for silence and stillness in the midst of busyness --- do not be afraid of the silence!

I will always remember a friend who used to say "When nothing is happening:

DO SOMETHING!

The story of Elijah and the example of Jesus and the great spiritual leaders, goes against that philosophy.

After his experience of God in the silence --- the question is again asked

"What are you doing here Elijah?"

and he answers in much the same way --- but I get the sense that in the answering he is starting to know what he is to do!

The next thing that happens is that God tells him "Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus, and anoint

- Hazael, king of Aram
- Jehu, King of Israel (in place of his enemy Ahab)
and
- Elisha as his own replacement

WHY? --- It seems to me that he has to face his own demons, including his own death, for him to be truly free.

But now, he has sufficient inner peace to do so.

The story of the healing of the man in the gospel has

similar themes.

His encounter with Jesus restores him to his right mind --- he too finds peace and freedom to once again be who his is!

The confirming part of the story and the demons going into the pigs emphasizes the completeness of the removal of the problem --- the completeness of God's power over the forces of evil.

The 'unclean' spirits do not want to return to the abyss and instead are sent into the 'unclean' animals which then rush into the abyss --- instead of the evil forces only one step removed, they are removed completely and in the way the Jews saw it, these animals were expendable.

On this subject I believe there has been quite some debate about the selling of pig meat in Israel. Now a secular state, the religious rites cannot be applied to all and so butchers can sell pig meat, much to the horror of orthodox Jews.

back to our story!

This man --- relieved of the oppression of the unclean spirits is persuaded NOT to go with Jesus, but to go home and declare what God has done.

He now has the inner peace and freedom and the spiritual resources to do so.

The question is for us.

What do we need to do to encounter God, to know the peace and freedom of Christ.

stillness, prayer, scriptures, being here, talking, listening, loving, sharing...

What are you doing here?