

Just recently, I was talking to a woman from Open Bible Lutheran Church, who several years ago had broken her hip while entering a resort hotel in Orlando that was under construction. She was hoping to spend some time with grandchildren, who had arrived to go to Disney. But instead, she was rushed to the hospital to surgically repair a broken hip. After the hip was fixed, it kept popping out. The lady was in and out of the Villages hospital, getting it popped back into place. Finally, she had the hip redone at West Marian, where the surgeon, said, "Whoever did this, really messed things up!" The lady said to me, "Pastor, what's next? What was next was that she needed to care for her husband who a few years before all this had to have his second bypass surgery. As time went on he got weaker and weaker. She took him from doctor to doctor. She was a frequent flier at Shand's hospital. But she told me that the night before her husband died, she prayed to God and said, "God, I can't take this any longer. I've had enough Lord." Well, the Lord, answered her prayer. Her husband went home to heaven the very next day, and her health today is much better.

We've all had times like those in our lives: one thing piling on after another, stress after stress, crisis after crisis, and you might be tempted to say to God, "what next?" And then, after you find out what's next, when even more problems come your way, finally you reach a breaking point and say something to the effect, "I have had enough, Lord! I'm sick and tired of the way things are, and are you going to do anything about it? I can't handle this anymore."

This morning we are going to see a man who was at the point of saying, "I can't handle this anymore." This man, who was so depressed that he actually prayed to the Lord to take his life. His name was Elijah.

As we look at this story, you will see that it is "Time To Come Out Of Your Cave!" 1. The Lord will Reprimand You, 2. The Lord will Revitalize and Refocus You.

In case you don't remember much about Elijah, he pretty much sums up his life in his first words of our text. "I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty." And that was the truth. Elijah had done everything he was supposed to do and more. He had confronted a king and queen (Ahab and Jezebel) about their sins. Elijah had lived by a stream for a few months, where he had to trust that the Lord would give him food in a place where there was none. God rewarded Elijah's faith by having birds fly in every day carrying food for him and sharing with him. If you've ever had a picnic around some hungry birds, you realize what a miracle it was that these birds shared food with this prophet. Birds sure don't do that naturally! Once Elijah had prayed for a dead boy, and the Lord brought him back to life. Or Remember what Elijah faced on Mt. Carmel. He had a face to face showdown with 450 prophets of the false god Baal. Remember how they set up their altar and called to Baal to bring down fire on their offering? Nothing happened. But when Elijah called to the Lord, the Lord brought fire from heaven and consumed his offering along with sucking up the water in the ditches around his offering. A glorious victory. Yes, Elijah could honestly say that he had been very zealous for the Lord.

But the way Elijah sees it, God hadn't held up his end of the bargain. Here was Elijah working hard, doing the things he was supposed to be doing, putting his trust in God. Here he thought that a religious revolution was going to happen in Israel, but instead Queen Jezebel puts a contract out on his life, and he, like a scared child runs to hide. In his cave, Elijah complains to God about the results of his faithful preaching, "the Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death by the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too." You can hear Elijah asking, "what's going on God? If I knew it was going to be like this, I wouldn't have taken this job."

And so the Lord has a rebuke for his depressed prophet. "What are you doing here,

Elijah?” “Haven’t I always been with you? Haven’t I always protected and provided for you? Haven’t I given you work to do instead of running away to a cave?” And then God teaches Elijah something about the way he works in this world. “Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and stood at the mouth of the cave.” God doesn’t always act miraculously and as powerfully as we would like to see. Sometimes we would wish that God acted more spectacularly and scare and frighten people into obeying him. But that’s not how he chooses to work. The only way that people are truly turned around is through that still small voice of the Gospel. That message of what God has done for us and continues to do for us. That simple Gospel that even a 3-year-old can understand. That good news that God loves sinners and has figured out a way to overcome people’s sins and give them eternal life, for free. A Savior, A Messiah, named Jesus. That is where God’s power lies!

But sometimes we are like Elijah: not only do we get down, but we want the Lord to act in a specific way, and if he doesn’t, we get all depressed and act as though God doesn’t care about us. Somewhere along the way we were tricked into thinking that the life of a believer is supposed to be easy. It isn’t! Noah. Moses. Jeremiah. Stephen. Paul. John. Did any of these guys have easy lives? Some of these believers were put to death! All were ridiculed for their beliefs. And should it surprise us that we have trouble?

On a scale of 1-10 on the happiness scale, with 10 being giggly-giddy happy, and 1 being down in the dumps depressed, where are you this morning? Elijah was at a 1 right here, and that happens to believers. It happens because we break the 1st Commandment, just as Elijah did here. Isn’t it ironic that this prophet, who was so zealous against false gods, finds himself not able to “fear, love, and trust in God above all things,” for if he did, he wouldn’t be moping around in this cave, asking to die. And we when are in the dumps, we are telling God, “no, I don’t believe you. I don’t believe you are going to take care of me.” And God would have every right to cut us off permanently from his blessings.

But in his grace, he doesn’t do that to us. He lifts us up from despair with his message of love and forgiveness, proven by the death of his Son Jesus. And he keeps lifting us up by pointing to all the blessings which we have, but probably never even took the time to notice. To Elijah God said, “Yet I reserve 7,000 in Israel – all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and all whose mouths have not kissed him.” You are not alone Elijah. There are 7000 other Christians that are alive. One of those 7,000 silent blessings for Elijah was a man named Elisha. God didn’t let Elijah mope around in his despair. He put Elijah to work, and encouraged him by showing him that his work was worth something.

Even though you may not feel like it, when you are depressed, do what the Lord wants you to do whether you feel like it or not. Get out and force yourself to exercise. Eat a balanced meal. Volunteer at your church or in the community. Don’t stew in self pity. The Lord still has work for you to do, even if you are widow or widower. Look at how Elijah went back to work. Get out of Your Cave.

Elijah was to anoint two kings, men named Jehu and Hazael. Who these men are isn’t important for right now, but it will help you to know that they were to become God’s tools in carrying out justice on the wicked king and queen Ahab and Jezebel, the ones who were trying to kill Elijah. God was showing Elijah that he was going to be taking action against all this evil, even if it seemed overdue from Elijah’s point of view.

But more important, Elijah was to find and train his successor, Elisha. In Elisha, God encourages the older prophet by showing him just how important his work had been. People had listened to him. Elisha was one of them. His life of being a prophet was not in vain.

When you are down, look for the Lord to send you an Elisha into your life. Elisha's aren't just church workers, pastors and teachers, though they might be an Elisha. An Elisha could be a believing friend who has just the right thing to say to lift your spirits.

And you, you may be called on, you will be called on, to be an Elisha, an encourager to a despondent Elijah. When I was coming back from college a number of years ago, I wasn't paying attention on a two lane road, in the final 30 miles from my home. I was talking to the passenger next to me. Suddenly, I looked ahead and a car had suddenly come to a stop in my lane, and was turning. I plowed in to the car. My first and only accident in my life. But it was my ghetto cruiser, a Chrysler New Yorker. I felt so bad about it, I acted as if it were the end of the world. I called my mom, and she said something to the effect, "You are alive. That's what counts. this isn't such a big deal. In 100 years, what will it matter"? Thanks Mom. You are right. I'll be in heaven in 100 years and I'm sure they'll have better things to talk about than my lack of driving skills." And those were really wise thoughts: what problem can a Christian go through that will not be solved in 100 years? Cancer, money problems, lack of friends...heaven has a way of fixing all these. What better way for you to be an Elisha to lift the spirits of another person than to lift their eyes away from the everyday problem, and lift their eyes up to the Savior Jesus, who has overcome our sins on the cross and continues to stand right by us even during our darkest days. Why not lift someone else up by telling them that even though their life here may be in a mess, they have a God who loves them, a Lord who has died for them, so that they can have an eternal life free from every stress and worry.

You know, the Lord did not answer Elijah's prayer when he asked to die. Odd that this person who prayed to die, didn't die. God did not let this prophet die, not then, and not ever. You might recall that Elijah was one of two people that we know of who never died...he was taken to heaven directly. When you are down, seek the blessings that will give you real and lasting relief. Focus on the cross of Jesus. Trust in Christ for your salvation. And concentrate on the heavenly home that the Lord will give his followers after the struggle through this life. So before you pray another, "Lord, I have had enough" prayer, remember that the Lord will decide when you've had enough, and when you have, he will welcome you into the mansions of paradise. Amen.