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St. Paul's Lutheran Church  
2100 16<sup>th</sup> Street SW  
Austin, MN 55912-1749  
Pastor Ted Barthels  
Sermon preached on  
August 27, 2017  
12<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: Romans 9:1-5; Matthew 14:22-33

Hymns: 16; 290; 775; 283 (242:1-3)

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: 1 Kings 19:9-18

And there he (*Elijah*) went into a cave, and spent the night in that place; and behold, the word of the Lord *came* to him, and He said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

<sup>10</sup> So he said, "I have been very zealous for the Lord God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life."

<sup>11</sup> Then He said, "Go out, and stand on the mountain before the Lord." And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the 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; <sup>12</sup> and after the earthquake a fire, *but* the Lord *was* not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice.

<sup>13</sup> So it was, when Elijah heard *it*, that he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave. Suddenly a voice *came* to him, and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

<sup>14</sup> And he said, "I have been very zealous for the Lord God of hosts; because the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life."

<sup>15</sup> Then the Lord said to him: "Go, return on your way to the Wilderness of Damascus; and when you arrive, anoint Hazael *as*

king over Syria. <sup>16</sup> Also you shall anoint Jehu the son of Nimshi *as* king over Israel. And Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel Meholah you shall anoint *as* prophet in your place. <sup>17</sup> It shall be *that* whoever escapes the sword of Hazael, Jehu will kill; and whoever escapes the sword of Jehu, Elisha will kill. <sup>18</sup> Yet I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him.” (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, God our Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Trust

Trust is what really lies at the heart of so many of our relationships. However in our earthly relationships we find trust to be very fragile. We find that often the people that are closest to us are not always trustworthy. We are disappointed when they don't fulfill a promise when we were counting on them, or when they just don't seem to care about something as much as we do, or if they betray a confidence. Oh, there are so many ways for trust to be undermined in our earthly relationships, and once it is damaged it is difficult for us to trust again. Sometimes it is not only difficult to trust that one individual who let us down, but it is more difficult for us to trust others as well, maybe extending to all those around us, either at work, or at home.

Now, how about trusting the Lord? I think we should all be able to agree that it is more important for us to maintain trust in the Lord than our trust in any else. The psalmist encourages us to trust the Lord and not to place our trust in princes (Psalm 118:9). We are told that we are to trust in the Lord with all our hearts and not to lean on our own understanding (Proverbs 3:5). But there's the catch. So often we are quicker to trust in other humans, especially humans who are supposed to be able to deliver us, like doctors and lawyers, and governors and presidents and such, than it is to trust in the Lord. It seems easier to trust in someone we can see with our eyes than to trust in someone we can't see with our eyes. And then there is that other aspect of this matter, “our own understanding.” Well, the

thing is we have our own way of thinking about things, and how things ought to be in our lives and in this world. And our reason appeals to us because it is reasonable, at least in our own estimation.

The Lord's way is so much higher than our ways that our reason cannot grasp the Lord's thinking, or the Lord's doing (Isaiah 55:8, 9). When things don't go as we think they ought to go, and I mean exactly as we think, or even simply desire or feel that they ought to go, our trust in the Lord is challenged.

There are things that we fear that we need not fear. The Lord assures us that He has defeated death, that He has overcome the world, but we still fear death and are all too often intimidated or simply overly influenced by the thinking of this world. This reveals a weakness in our trust in the Lord and in His Word.

This isn't new with our generation. The failings of trust even with the Lord go way back. Indeed, God in His wisdom and grace caused the holy writers to record the struggles of others who have gone before us that we might be instructed by their experience with the Lord. So it is that we have before us the example of the Prophet Elijah. Elijah was hero of faith, one who was counted faithful by the Lord so that Elijah did not see death, but as one of only two exceptions in all history was received directly into heaven. However, that was not because of Elijah's glory and strength but the Lord's grace. In our text we see that even Elijah could become discouraged and struggle with issues of trusting the Lord in His ways.

So it was that the Lord directed Elijah on a long journey to the Mountain of God, Mount Horeb, which is also called Mount Sinai. And there Elijah found shelter in a cave where God spoke to Elijah just as He had spoken to Moses so many centuries earlier. God addressed Elijah with a question that was important in putting Elijah's life into its proper godly perspective --

### **THEME: What Are You Doing Here?**

Elijah's answer to the Lord could easily and accurately be summed up with the words --

## **I. Feeling Defeated. (Feelings can be so deceiving.)**

Elijah's answer sounds rehearsed. As we will note a little later, Elijah had it down pat.

**1 Kings 9:10** "So he said, 'I have been very zealous for the Lord God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life.'"

One might almost think that Elijah was missing the point. He could have said, "Following your instructions as you directed me to come here." However, that would have been flippant. Elijah knew why the Lord had directed him to come to Horeb. Elijah knew he was at the mountain of God. Elijah knew that there was an issue with him and his faith and his ministry that needed to be addressed by the Lord. Without doubt Elijah was discouraged. He felt defeated. He had just experienced one of the greatest victories over false prophet in history when he met 700 priests of Baal with the challenge to call down fire from their god to burn up the sacrifice offered to Baal. After hours of calling and dancing and even slashing themselves so blood poured out on the ground, Baal did nothing. Baal did nothing because Baal was nothing but an idol, a dumb idol. Then Elijah prepared his altar and sacrifice to the Lord and repeatedly doused it with water. Elijah made one short prayer which the Lord answered with fire from heaven. That day Elijah won over the people of Israel and the 700 prophets of Baal were put to death.

That victory lasted only that one day. When Queen Jezebel heard of the execution of the priests of Baal she was infuriated and promised to kill Elijah. He lost all support from the people. He was pretty sure that he stood alone as faithful to God. He felt that he was all alone. Elijah was convinced that all his life's work was in vain. He felt defeated by Ahab and Jezebel and the evil in this world. Feelings can be so deceiving.

Here we come to the point for us don't we? It is so easy to say all we are trying to do for the Lord and the advancement of the gospel isn't getting us anywhere. We feel that we can't prevail against the trends of popular religion and cultural norms that celebrate sin and

espouse the innate goodness of man as the way to righteousness and eternal life. And besides that our own reason can grasp that and find it appealing. All the other churches seem to be growing. Maybe we need to do what they are doing, which of course includes to one degree or another forsaking the truth of Holy Scripture, denying the power of the gospel, and endorsing the philosophy of this world. So the question needs to be addressed to us also, “**What are you doing here?**” Why did the Lord summon **you**, and call **you** to be a part of His Church on earth, call **you** to be one of His holy people? Isn’t it so that you also might “*proclaim the praises of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light*” (1 Peter 2:9). But then maybe you feel defeated. Well, feelings can be and often are deceiving and counter-productive.

Neither our salvation nor our mission or purpose in life flow from our feelings. They come to us by the gracious power of God. We daren’t forget that. God would not have us forget it any more than He was going to allow Elijah to forget it. The Lord brought Elijah to Mount Horeb, to the mountain of God so that Elijah might learn a lesson about the power of God.

By inspiration of the Holy Spirit we share in --

## **II. Observing the Quiet Power of God’s Word.**

Elijah had just experienced the most dramatic event in his ministry. The fire of God had descended from heaven and consumed the sacrifice, and all the water, and the altar of stones that Elijah had assembled. It proved that the Lord, He is God! Add to that Elijah prayed, and that day the drought that had lasted for three and a half years was brought to a close in dramatic fashion. A little cloud appeared in the distance but before long it poured rain upon Israel. And yet, when it came right down to it, the hearts of the people were not changed. They still feared Queen Jezebel and King Ahab, and the people liked worshiping Baal and lewdly dancing about the Asherah poles.

So now God directed Elijah out of the cave on Mount Horeb that he might comprehend the true power of God.

**1 Kings 19:11-13** “And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the 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; <sup>12</sup>and after the earthquake a fire, *but* the Lord *was* not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice. <sup>13</sup>So it was, when Elijah heard *it*, that he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave.”

The power of God isn't about the dramatic. As impressive as the winds of a hurricane might be, even a monster like Harvey when it came ashore in Texas, if God is not in the wind what is that? And so it was also with the earthquake, and we all know how devastatingly powerful earthquakes can be. And then fire, think of the news reports you have seen of the wild fires in California. It is all impressive, so impressive, so overwhelming especially compared to our puny strength. But God was not in the wind, or the earthquake, or the fire, but when the still small voice, that whisper came upon Elijah, and God was with the still small voice, Elijah had to turn away and cover his face. That still small voice with the Lord was true power.

And so it is yet today. God doesn't present Himself to the world in the winds of the hurricane, or the trembling of the earthquake, or the blasting heat of a wild fire. As powerful as they may appear they do not possess the power to change the world, to change the hearts of man, to bring to us salvation, as does the still small voice of the Word of God. God's greatest power is in the oft despised proclamation of the gospel of Christ crucified, “*to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God*” (1Corinthians 1:23-24).

That is the lesson we need to learn and remember always. The still small voice of the gospel is the power which God used to call you faith, to change your heart from a heart of stone to a heart of flesh (Ezekiel 36:26), to make you who were *dead in trespasses... alive together with Christ* (Ephesians 2:5). It is the gospel that is “*the power of God unto salvation for everyone who believes!*” (Romans 1:16) and that is exactly why Paul declared, “*I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ.*” He learned that therein “*the righteousness of*

*God is revealed.*” He trusted that if he but preached the gospel of Christ, and not human wisdom, hearts would be changed, and people would be saved, even as Paul himself was saved by the power of the still small voice of Jesus, his God and Lord.

Do you get it? So much of religion in our society is caught up in the outward, the visible, the power of programs, the power of numbers, the glory of the cathedral, the wonder of the spiritual experience, the big bang charismatic wonders. God is not in the building of grand cathedrals, or hyped up demonstrations devised to deceive. God our Savior remains in the still small voice of the gospel. You can count on it. You can put your confidence in His Word, You can **trust** His Word for the power it brings to this world, to your own life.

So it was time for the Lord to move in this lesson of trust for Elijah,

### **III. Proceeding with the Authority of the Sure Word of God.**

**1 Kings 9: 13-18** Suddenly a voice *came* to him, and said, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” <sup>14</sup>And he said, “I have been very zealous for the Lord God of hosts; because the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life.” <sup>15</sup>Then the Lord said to him: “Go, return on your way to the Wilderness of Damascus; and when you arrive, anoint Hazael *as* king over Syria. <sup>16</sup>Also you shall anoint Jehu the son of Nimshi *as* king over Israel. And Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel Meholah you shall anoint *as* prophet in your place. <sup>17</sup>It shall be *that* whoever escapes the sword of Hazael, Jehu will kill; and whoever escapes the sword of Jehu, Elisha will kill. <sup>18</sup>Yet I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him.”

God presents the question once again, “What are you doing here Elijah?” It seems that Elijah is stuck. He’s stuck in his dismal outlook in spite of the demonstration of God’s power in the still small voice. He gives the same lame, self-pitying answer he gave earlier. That is the way of human frailty. As shameful as it is we are really no different. To claim to be so would be to claim that we are superior to Elijah, and deny that we also are subject to

discouragement, and a failure to trust the power of the Lord in the Gospel.

God isn't stuck. The Lord is ready to move on. The Lord has a plan and is ready for Elijah to announce that plan. The Lord has a plan for continuing the ministry in Israel after Elijah. The Lord has a plan for this world. The Lord determines who shall rule and what success they shall have in ruing the kingdoms of this world. The Lord's plan doesn't depend upon us remembering that He is in charge, much less on us endorsing His plan. After all we do pray, "for Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever and ever. Amen!" And that's the truth. Remember it. Trust that it is true and then, and then go out and tell the people God has set before you about the wonders God has done, and the power and the majesty of our God and how He has revealed His power to save. Jesus is Lord. He rules the world, and He does it all with but a still small voice. That includes preserving His own in this wicked world. Even as the Lord preserved the 7000 in Israel who had not bowed the knee to Baal, so He preserves His own yet today by the Spirit working through the still small voice of His Word.

What are you doing here? May it be that we are receiving the Lord's instruction that we may present to others the will of God for their salvation, that the power of the still small voice of the gospel might change their hearts and bring them to everlasting life. Know His Word. Trust the power of His Word to save.

**AMEN.**

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.