

The Storm of Doubt

For today's sermon, I would like to focus not on the obvious demonstration of Jesus showing that He can do what it was believed that only the divine could do, but rather on Peter and alongside Peter, Elijah from the reading in 1 Kings, who had moments of doubt due to the storms around them and what they say to us today. These readings from 1 Kings 19 and Matthew 14 have a similarity between them which might be initially overlooked, especially if we do not consider what led up to Elijah hiding out in a cave.

Elijah had just defeated Baal's prophets in a mighty show of power by calling down fire on a mountain in a contest to see who has the mightier God and afterwards, Queen Jezebel was infuriated that Elijah killed those prophets of the Baal and put a price on his head. Elijah was running for his life from Jezebel. He felt alone; as if all that he had done was for nothing, those whom he thought would come to believe in the God of the Israelites had not done so. He was exhausted and felt that he had reached the end of his ministry. Today, we hear Elijah trying to tell God that he was through, that he had enough, he was resigning.

The Gospel reading follows last week's reading where Jesus fed the 5000 with just 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish in a wilderness area where Jesus had been hoping to get a little R&R. After sending everyone away, including the disciples who headed for their next destination across the lake, He got His much-anticipated R&R through prayer. When He finished later that night, He caught up with the disciples on the lake by walking on the water during a storm. This is where our story takes place.

At first glance, we may not see the connection between Elijah and Peter, but when we put Elijah's story in context, we see the similarities between the two. You see, both Elijah and Peter experienced a moment of doubt, of wondering if what they were doing was worth the price. Elijah's doubt came when he took his eyes off of what God had

done on the mountain with the fire and bringing an end to the drought that was going on for 3 years. He 'looked' into the storm that Jezebel caused by her anger at Elijah for killing Baal's prophets and he lost focus on God. Losing his focus, Ellijah sank into a storm of despair, of feeling isolated. Peter, when he first got out of the boat, he was able to walk on the water because kept his focus on Jesus. However, when he took his eyes off Jesus and looked at the waves and wind that whipped around him, he sank. Both of these men did something that people cannot do without the presence of God. But these super-natural feats were soon replaced when they lost focus on the source of those feats and focused on the storms around them. However, through the sheer silence that Elijah heard and by Peter turning his focus back to Jesus and pled for help from Jesus, both of these men recovered what they had lost.

Another interesting thing we see when we look at these two stories is that they were at different places in their personal journey of faith. Elijah was near the end of his calling while Peter was just beginning his calling from Jesus. Even though both had moments of doubt due to the storms around them, they overcame those doubts by refocusing on God and doing what they were called to do.

These moments of doubt led Elijah and Peter to moments of desperation. Elijah instead of seeing himself as successful in showing the power of God over the power of Baal, in his state of desperation, saw himself as a failure, as someone alone and isolated. He knew that God came to others in various ways and as he experienced great winds, an earthquake and fire, he looked for God in those things, but could not find God. It was in the sheer silence that God came to Elijah. God came to Elijah, in quietude, not those majestic ways when creation was made or when Moses met God or any other way that God came to humanity before. It was this silence that Elijah needed so that he could refocus on what was important - that is the work of God. While God does accept Elijah's 'resignation' God still has some tasks for Elijah to complete. God also assures Elijah that

he is not alone, as he presumes. Likewise, Peter's moment of doubt led him to a state of desperation when he starts to sink after he stepped out of a floating boat and he noticed exactly where he was, knowing that he shouldn't be walking on water, especially in a storm.

So, we find both Elijah and Peter in a state of desperation surrounded by a storm because they were following God. While facing these storms, God comes to both Elijah and Peter in the way that they needed at the time. Up to this point, Elijah had been on high energy, so to speak. His miraculous showing on the mountain, the killing of Baal's prophets and the running from Jezebel all had Elijah's senses on high alert. Instead of coming to him in an equally high energy state, God lowers the energy by coming to him in silence. It is like when someone is throwing a major league temper tantrum and you try to get their attention. At first you try to yell as loudly as or louder than they are, usually to no avail. But when you lower your voice, talk to them calmly, they start to lower their energy and are then able to respond to you. It's like that proverbial 2x4 that is used to get our attention. Sometimes, instead of the 2x4 or something bigger, a feather is more effective. Jesus comes to Peter to pull him up out of the water. While Peter had lost focus, Jesus didn't just stand by encouraging Peter to try harder, being a cheerleader or coach to focus more; to will himself up out of the water; Jesus acted and grabbed Peter.

It is also important to notice that Peter did not start yelling at his friends in the boat to throw him a life-ring or grab him with one of the oars. What Peter did was to refocus on Jesus, to turn to Jesus and plea for a saving hand. When Elijah realized that the storm from Jezebel was out for him, he did not turn to compatriots looking for them to protect him. He went alone into the wilderness to seek God.

How can we use these stories of Elijah and Peter facing storms of doubt in our faith journeys? For one, it doesn't matter who we are, there will be moments when life's

storms will seem to be too much for us, feel as if they are a real threat to our very existence. It is the reactions to these doubt by Elijah and Peter that show us that when we refocus on what is important, that is God and Jesus, that we are able to overcome those storms and continue to do what God is calling us to do at that time. We see that regardless of where we are in our journey of faith -whether near the end like Elijah or near the beginning like Peter or somewhere in-between - God can still use us to accomplish what God wants. God did not just accept Elijah's 'resignation' and let him go to the prophet's retirement home. God still had something for Elijah to do. Jesus just didn't wait to see if Peter could get to the boat himself or with the help of his friends, but grabbed him and pulled him out of the waters.

At the risk of reading too much into the text, we could say that this Gospel text shows us that regardless of what we are called to do by Jesus, if we start to fail, if we lose focus on our task and for whom we are doing it, then Jesus is there to provide that helping hand to save us from failure and to take us to a safe place.

So, when we are faced with the storms of doubt in our lives, we can use Elijah and Peter as examples of how to respond to those doubts and trust that we do not have to calm those storms ourselves.

YouTube links:

Gospel and Sermon: <https://youtu.be/gK1ifxuQ-do>

Service: <https://youtu.be/Zg-jT2S21ZY>