

1 Kings 19:1-7 “What We Want or What We Need”

Every now and then I have to apologize for neglecting the Old Testament. I mean golly ... it takes up 77% of our Bible, and yet I still spend most of my time preaching from the New Testament. Which seems strange since the Old Testament is what kicked off my journey of faith in the first place. When I attended Lutheran kindergarten, I loved the Bible stories. The New Testament didn't really interest me at the time. Jesus was okay, I guess, but his stories seemed to be all about preaching, healing people and ... well ... dying. I mean, yeah, there was the resurrection, but for a little kid that seemed ... unimpressive somehow. But the Old Testament? That's where you find bigger-than-life heroes who fought battles and were given divine strength and powers! So take a kid who loves comic books, and pair that kid with a Sunday School teacher who uses flannel boards! Because flannel boards are just do-it-yourself comic book page panels, right? When that kid gets called on to lay out a panel showing how little shepherd boy David takes out an eight foot giant with a sling and a rock? That's magic! So, I apologize for neglecting the Old Testament. Let's change that. I want to do a series on “Heroic Prophets” for a while. But before we do that, let me give you a brief Old Testament timeline lesson. The Old Testament can be divided up into five periods – Patriarchs (the migration West to Palestine), The Exodus (Enslavement and escape from Egypt, settling the Promise Land), The United Kingdom (David and Solomon), The Divided Kingdom (Israel and Judah), the exile to Babylon and Reunified Israel. Each period has its hero prophets.

I've already told you that my favorite Old Testament hero prophet is Daniel because he's sort like the “Batman: World's Greatest Detective” character during Israel's exiled in Babylon. But my other favorite hero prophet is Elijah, who ministered in the Northern Kingdom of Israel during the reign of King Ahab. I like him because he was always having these dramatic power-encounters with the Prophets of the Canaanite god, “Ba'al.” And he wasn't afraid to challenge the corrupt King Ahab and his wife Jezebel for choosing Canaanite gods over the God of Israel.

I also like Elijah because he was kind of a smart-aleck. One time he asked the Prophets of Ba'al if their god had to excuse himself to use the bathroom when Ba'al failed to rain fire down on their animal sacrifice.

This week, the lectionary gives us a story about Elijah being on the run from King Ahab's wild and crazy wife Jezebel. She wanted to have Elijah killed, so he fled south to the wildlands of the Kingdom of Judah to hide out. He figured that Jezebel couldn't touch him if he hid out in the neighboring kingdom. This is where we learn that Elijah is kind of a "Glass Half-Empty" guy. In verse 4-5 he says, "I'm done. I've had it. I just want to die out here in the wilderness. Come take me away, Lord!"

I've always said that God calls a wide variety of people into ministry. You've got people like Moses and Jeremiah who say, "Oh, I can't do this" and point out their many faults as reason why they shouldn't go do what God told them. Then you've got people like Isaiah who stand up, raise their hands high in the air and say, "Oooh! Ooh! Choose me! Here I am Lord, send me!" Then you have people like Jonah who try to run from God, but end up exactly where God wanted them in the first place. And today we have Elijah ... the guy who would rather just die ... alone ... in the middle of nowhere ... in the cold and rain instead of just trusting God that things are going to be okay.

I have had to admit, I can be a little like Elijah sometimes. But I also have to say I don't like it when people judge others for how they're wired. How we are wired is *not* a character flaw. We can work toward overcoming some of the faults that often go along with how we're wired, but we can't keep beating ourselves up for something that's a part of our nature. So please ... stop shaming the pessimist. Once they get out of their funk, they can do amazing things! But I want to illustrate what it's like to be an "Elijah" and what it's like to learn a valuable lesson from God. But to do that, we've got to go back to chapter 17 when God first called Elijah. God found Elijah and told him, "Go from here and turn eastward, and hide yourself by the Wadi Cherith which is east of the Jordan River." So already, Elijah is getting lessons on hiding out in the

wilderness. And while Elijah was hunkered down at Wadi Cherith, God sent ravens to bring him food. This was God's way of saying, "Don't worry, I'll take care of you." It was a demonstration of God's providence. It was God's way of showing Elijah that no matter how bleak things might look, there will be a "raven" there to remind him that God provides. So let's see what happens if I change my name to "Elijah," go hunker up over here in my cave and gripe about how horrible things are.

Elijah - *Ahem* ... Oh God! These last six months have been so awful. The fires turned everything upside down. So many things were destroyed. So many people lost their homes. So many people lost their lives. People from the burn zone were swarming all over town in every nook and cranny looking for shelter. Everything was smoky and covered in ash. So many people have been displaced. Traffic is horrible. It takes hours to get something done at the DMV and if you try to make an appointment, you've got to make it for weeks in advance. Nothing is normal ... nothing is right. I just want to go hide.

Raven #1 (Connie) – But Elijah, remember there was a *huge* outpouring of help from all over the country. Week of Compassion sent a solidarity grant to both the Paradise Church and the Chico Church, plus grants to every family in both churches who lost their houses. Our regional church was on the phone to you and Pastor Janice offering their help and support. Then we started getting all sorts of financial support from churches, organizations and individuals from all over the country. Did you know that there was a Disciples Church in Fort Worth, TX that dedicated the proceeds from their annual chili cook-off to disaster relief? We've been able to help so many people with gift cards that were sent to Paradise and Chico. So many of our sister churches in this region like First Christian Church in Pacific Grove and Woodland, and Sacramento, and Vacaville sent gift cards and donated to Week of Compassion. Did you know there was a synagogue in Napa Valley that sent almost \$2,000 in gift cards to help survivors? Come on Elijah. God provides!

Elijah - But what about all the faithful hard-working church folks and leaders we lost because of the fires or who had to leave because the price of housing drove them out of the area? We lost some of our newest members who were actively participating in the life of the church! We've even lost some of our rock steady folks who've been serving the church for years! We're short an elder and a board member now. We were growing! We were making progress! Now look at us. We're back to square one.

Raven #2 – (Joe Rogers) Elijah, don't forget about the people who are still here. We have so much talent and potential in this church. And so many people have started coming to church over the last year too. Many of them have stepped up to the plate as leaders too. Don't get so tied up in worrying about the folks we've lost that you forget to give thanks for the ones who are still here.

Elijah - Yeah, but there's the flood too. It happened at the worst possible time. Half of our rooms are unusable. The insurance stopped covering asbestos removal in November, so we had to cover the expense out of our own pockets for all those flooded rooms that had drywall. Our internet is down. Our phones are down. We haven't been able to post on social media and our YouTube channel. Our church is a mess. We're missing things. All of our important stuff is out in the storage pods. We don't know where anything is. There's a layer of dust on everything.

Raven #3 (Mary) – But we're so much more visible than we used to be. People know who we are in the community because we've been faithful to our mission. So what if we haven't been on Social Media or YouTube much lately? We've still been doing good ministry. Even with half the rooms in our church out of commission, we're still able to provide space for First Christian Paradise, Shalom Clinic, all of our support groups ... we've still been able to host events for NAMI, Stonewall, and CHAT. We've even had some new support groups come in since then. Plus we're hosting two support groups through Resilience

Resources for people affected by the Camp Fire. We're still doing great ministry. And sure, the insurance didn't cover some things, but look at the things it *did* cover. We were able to put better floors in the offices. And to be honest, the flood forced us to "clean house" and get rid of some junk that we really didn't need. And we had money in our savings and investments that we were saving for a rainy day. And guess what? It rained. Hard. God provides. God brings hope.

Elijah - Well thank you ravens. I guess things aren't as bad as they seem when you compare them to the blessings. I guess I can crawl out of this cave and get back to doing what God called me to do.

Raven #4 (Barbara) – Hey, don't feel bad about going to the cave. You need to get away sometimes. We all do. Just don't waste your time in the cave fussing and worrying. Use that cave time to count your blessings and be thankful for me and all the other ravens who God sends to provide what you need!

Elijah – Okay. I'm good to go now. I guess it's really easy to get bogged down in all the things that don't seem to be going well and not be thankful for the things that are going well. I mean, there's what I want, but there's what I need too. Thank you ravens. You're what I needed. I guess that what it all comes down to is that ...

God is good ...

All the time

And all the time ...

God is good.

Great is the Lord,

And greatly to be praised.