

Sermon followed by Service

June 18, 2023 1 Kings 18

It's time. The skies are blue, but that's nothing new. For 3-and-a-half years the sun's been scorching. The crops are ruined. The rivers and streams are dry. The pantries are empty. It's time. It's time to put up or shut up. It's showdown time.

It's time for a showdown - a showdown between good and evil, between the powers of God and the powers of the Baals. It's time for a showdown - who will show himself to be true?

Elijah shows himself. He knows the danger. King Ahab has been hunting him down with a vengeance; for years, Elijah's been the subject of a multi-state, multi-country manhunt. Now, at the LORD's direction, Elijah shows himself, calls for the showdown, sets the terms - where, when, how and what.

Elijah shows himself. He isn't afraid to be seen and heard. Even though he was being blamed for all the trouble in Israel: even though he was the unwanted voice of God with God's judgment in Israel, Elijah isn't afraid to be seen and heard standing with the "bad news" LORD: "**Summon the people from all over Israel to meet me at Mt Carmel** (overlooking the Mediterranean Sea)." Elijah isn't worried about being outnumbered: "**Bring the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah.**" Elijah isn't afraid of being unnumbered. And Elijah isn't afraid that he'll be left in the lurch. He calls for a showdown that can't be fixed or pretended. He calls for two

bulls - one for the prophets of Baal, one for himself as the prophet of the LORD. Each would prepare their bull as a burnt offering, and then each would call on their God. **“The God who answers by fire - he is God.”**

Elijah let the prophets of Baal go first; he let them go for hours. He egged them on give their all, to give their best.- **“Shout louder!” he said. “Surely he is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or traveling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened.”** We might laugh, but it’s sad, isn’t it? It’s sad how determined we can be, how self-destructing determined we can be to hold on to a lie. It’s sad - isn’t it? - how determined, how self-destructing determined we can be to refuse to admit when we are wrong. It’s sad - isn’t it? - how far people can be willing to go to live their lies. We laugh, but we’ve all played the fool, haven’t we? Insisting on our lies, believing our own lies, insisting on our lies even as they destroy us. Thank you, Lord, for stopping us, right?

While the fools live their lies, Elijah does what the LORD loves to do. He takes rejects, stones from a rejected, broken down altar for the LORD, and in front of everyone he rebuilds the rejected, broken down altar for the LORD. He digs a trench around the altar, he has the altar and the wood and the sacrifice flooded with water. Elijah had no tricks up his sleeve, no trick bull, no trick altar, no trick fire waiting to be lit. Elijah had no tricks up his sleeve, but he has the LORD up in heaven.

Elijah prays: **“O LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and**

that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command. Answer me, O LORD, answer me, so these people will know that you, O LORD, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again.” Then what? Fire from the LORD fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench.

Sounds like time to celebrate, doesn't it? Not for Elijah. For Elijah it was time to drive the nails into the coffin of Baal worship. He orders the slaughter of the false prophets. We might find that hard to explain. Why? It doesn't sit well in our times, does it? We live in an age of religious tolerance. If our world wants a god at all, it wants a mellow, accepting God, and Elijah's religious fervor is considered to be too extreme and wrong. In a world that expects religion to tolerate and accept evil, Elijah's judgment might not feel right.

But the slaughter of the prophets wasn't Elijah's judgment; it was God's judgment. For hundreds of years, God's orders were clear - "Purge the poison before it kills you." God had been commanding the death of false prophets in Israel; not because he was harsher in the Old Testament, but because he had a special purpose and mission for his Old Testament church - in its special corner of the world, to hold to his truth and give birth to the Savior. In the New Testament God has a different mission for his New Testament Church - God's purpose for us isn't to keep evil out of our corner of the world, but to go out into the world, to shine with the light of his truth, and to share the love of God in Jesus. That doesn't mean that we have a mellow God, that God was harsh in the Old Testament, but he's a different God today, a

mellower God today. Don't fall for that line; read Revelation or Romans (for that matter) and look at the judgment God is working today, look ahead to the judgment God has in store for those who are against him, and you will not find a mellow, accepting God. Look at the cross and you will see just how much he hates sin.

That leads to what I think is the saddest moment in our lesson. It wasn't watching the Baal prophets dance for fire. It wasn't hearing Elijah's judgment. Did you catch it? The saddest sound in our lesson is the silence of the people when he called them to follow the LORD - "**How long will you waver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him.**" But the people said nothing." What's so sad there? Not just the silence of the people. But my silence. My silence in speaking up against sin and evil. My silence in speaking up for God. How often haven't we been silent when it was time for us to speak up. It's a wonder that God didn't sweep Elijah up off the mountain up to heaven, and then burn up everybody left on the mountain - not just the dancing, prancing prophets of Baal, but the masses who stood silent.

I think that might be the most amazing thing in our lesson. More amazing than Elijah's faith, more amazing than the fire from heaven, more amazing than the rain. The amazing grace of God that he didn't just sweep his silent ones off the face of the mountain. The amazing grace of God that he was willing to give them another chance. The amazing grace of God that he was willing to humble himself and prove himself to his people all over again for the umpteenth time. The amazing grace of God

that he is willing to give me, to give us another opportunity to stand up and speak up with him.

That leads into what I think is the happiest moment in our lesson. The moment that had the saints and angels in heaven chest-bumping, fist-bumping, high-fiving, cheering. It wasn't when God fired up and burned up the offerings. It wasn't when God worked his justice and the prophets of Baal were slaughtered. It wasn't when God showed mercy and sent his rain pouring down on the dry, parched land. No, the happiest moment in our lesson that had the saints and angels cheering up in heaven has to be this - "When all the people saw this [the fire from the LORD], they fell prostrate and cried, **"The LORD—he is God! The LORD—he is God!"**"

That moment when God's people got off the fence, when they let go of Baal, when they let loose their silence and let loose with God - "**The LORD—he is God! The LORD—he is God!**" Those moments when we get off the fence, when we fill our silence with the truth of God ... Those are the moments that Jesus lived for. Those are the moments that Jesus died for.

When we let go our sin and speak up, "Father, forgive me," Jesus doesn't stand by silently; he doesn't wait to see what someone else might say. No, Jesus points to the cross: "Your sin is paid for; your sin is gone; you are forgiven." When we let go our pride and cry out, "Father, take me back," he doesn't stand by to see what others do. No, he speaks up: "Welcome home."

When we let go our fear to stand up and speak up with him, the Spirit doesn't wait to see what happens. No, he gives us the promise of the Father and the Son - "I'm here for you; I'm here with you."

We don't have to stay stuck in our sin. We don't have to remain silent. No matter who or how many are speaking up, standing up against him [Jesus], we get to stand up and speak up with Jesus.

But what if he doesn't send fire? What if he doesn't send rain? Why would we settle for fire and rain? We have something better, more powerful. You have the gentle whisper of Jesus: "I love you; I forgive you; I've got you." Amen. [We'll talk more about that gentle whisper in July.]

June 17 & 18, 2023

THE SERVICE

IN OUR WORLD TODAY ... we might often feel outnumbered by the forces of evil and tempted to go with the flow of the world around us.

IN OUR WORSHIP TODAY ... we see an **Impossible Faith for Impossible Times** as Elijah stands “alone,” and God shows that Elijah was not alone.

OPENING HYMN

“All Praise to God Who Reigns Above”

Hymn 603

All praise to God who reigns above, the God of all creation,
the God of wonders, pow’r, and love, the God of our salvation!
With healing balm my soul he fills, the God who ev’ry sorrow stills:
To God all praise and glory!

What God’s almighty pow’r has made, in mercy he is keeping;
by morning dawn or evening shade his eye is never sleeping.
Within the kingdom of his might, all things are just and good and right:
to God all praise and glory!

I cried to him in time of need: Lord God, O hear my calling!
For death he gave me life indeed and kept my feet from falling.
For this my thanks shall endless be; O thank him, thank our God with me:
to God all praise and glory!

The Lord will not forsake his flock, his chosen generation;
he is their refuge and their rock, their peace and their salvation.
As with a mother’s tender hand he leads his own, his chosen band:
to God all praise and glory!

All who confess Christ’s holy name, to God give praise and glory!
Let all who know his pow’r proclaim aloud the wondrous story!
All idols under foot be trod — The Lord is God! The Lord is God!
To God all praise and glory!

INVOCATION

In the name of the Father and of the T Son and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves
and the truth is not in us.

**If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just
and will forgive us our sins
and purify us from all unrighteousness.**

Let us confess our sins to the Lord.

Holy God, gracious Father,

I am sinful by nature

and have sinned against you in my thoughts, words, and actions.

I have not loved you with my whole heart;

I have not loved others as I should.

I deserve your punishment both now and forever.

But Jesus, my Savior, paid for my sins

with his innocent suffering and death.

Trusting in him, I pray: God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

Silence for meditation and reflection

Our gracious Father in heaven has been merciful to us. He sent his only Son, Jesus Christ, who gave his life as the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. Therefore, as a called servant of Christ and by his authority, I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the T Son and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

LORD, HAVE MERCY

In peace let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

For the peace from above and for our salvation, let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

For the peace of the whole world, for the well-being of the Church of God, and for the unity of all, let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

For this holy house and for all who offer here their worship and praise, let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

Help, save, comfort, and defend us, gracious Lord.

Amen.

GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST

CW 176

Refrain: Glory to God in the highest, and peace to his people on earth.

Lord God, heavenly King, almighty God and Father, we worship you, we give you thanks, we praise you for your glory. *Refrain*

Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father, Lord God, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world; have mercy on us. You are seated at the right hand of the Father; receive our prayer. *Refrain*

For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord, you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit in the glory of God the Father. Amen. Amen. *Refrain*

PRAYER OF THE DAY

O God, protector of all the faithful, you alone make strong; you alone make holy. Preserve us from all harm and danger that we, being ready in both body and soul, may cheerfully accomplish what you want done; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

Elijah went before the people and said, “How long will you waver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him.”

But the people said nothing.

Then Elijah said to them, “I am the only one of the LORD’s prophets left, but Baal has four hundred and fifty prophets. Get two bulls for us. Let Baal’s prophets choose one for themselves, and let them cut it into pieces and put it on the wood but not set fire to it. I will prepare the other bull and put it on the wood but not set fire to it. Then you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the LORD. The god who answers by fire—he is God.”

Then all the people said, “What you say is good.”

Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, “Choose one of the bulls and prepare it first, since there are so many of you. Call on the name of your god, but do not light the fire.” So they took the bull given them and prepared it.

Then they called on the name of Baal from morning till noon. “Baal, answer us!” they shouted. But there was no response; no one answered. And they danced around the altar they had made.

At noon Elijah began to taunt them. “Shout louder!” he said. “Surely he is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or traveling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened.” So they shouted louder and slashed themselves with swords and spears, as was their custom, until their blood flowed. Midday passed, and they continued their frantic prophesying until the time for the evening sacrifice. But there was no response, no one answered, no one paid attention.

Then Elijah said to all the people, “Come here to me.” They came to him, and he repaired the altar of the LORD, which had been torn down. Elijah took twelve stones, one for each of the tribes descended from Jacob, to whom the word of the LORD had come, saying, “Your name shall be Israel.” With the stones he built an altar in the name of the LORD, and he dug a trench around it large enough to hold two seahs of seed. He arranged the wood, cut the bull into pieces and laid it on the wood.

Then he said to them, “Fill four large jars with water and pour it on the offering and on the wood.”

“Do it again,” he said, and they did it again.

“Do it a third time,” he ordered, and they did it the third time. The water ran down around the altar and even filled the trench.

At the time of sacrifice, the prophet Elijah stepped forward and prayed: “LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command. Answer me, LORD, answer me, so these people will know that you, LORD, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again.”

Then the fire of the LORD fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench.

When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, “The LORD—he is God! The LORD—he is God!”

The Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM OF THE DAY

Psalm 46A

Refrain

The LORD Al - might - y is
with us; the God of Ja - cob is our for - tress.

Tone

God is our ref- / uge and strength,
an ever-present help in / trouble.
Therefore we will not fear, though the / earth give way
and the mountains fall into the heart / of the sea,
though its waters / roar and foam
and the mountains quake with their / surging. *Refrain*

There is a river whose streams make glad the cit- / y of God,
the holy place where the Most / High dwells.
God is within her, she / will not fall;
God will help her at / break of day.
"Be still, and know that / I am God;
I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted / in the earth."
**Glory be to the Father and / to the Son
and to the Holy / Spirit,
as it was in the be- / ginning,
is now, and will be forever. / Amen. *Refrain***

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Matthew 28:20

Alleluia. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.
Alleluia.

GOSPEL

Mark 14:32–42

They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." He took Peter, James and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled. "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death," he said to them. "Stay here and keep watch."

Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him. "Abba, Father," he said, "everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will."

Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Simon," he said to Peter, "are you asleep? Couldn't you keep watch for one hour? Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."

Once more he went away and prayed the same thing. When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. They did not know what to say to him.

Returning the third time, he said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Enough! The hour has come. Look, the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!"

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise be to you, O Christ!

HYMN OF THE DAY

"Rise! To Arms! With Prayers Employ You"

Hymn 871

Rise! To arms! With prayer employ you,
O Christians, lest the foe destroy you, for Satan has designed your fall.
Wield God's Word, a weapon glorious; against each foe you'll be
victorious, for God will set you o'er them all.
Fear not the prince of hell, here is Immanuel! Sing hosanna!
The strong ones yield to Christ, our shield,
and we as conqu'rors hold the field.

Cast afar this world's vain pleasure and boldly strive for heav'nly treasure.
Be steadfast in the Savior's might. Trust the Lord, who stands beside you,
for Jesus from all harm will hide you. By faith you'll conquer in the fight.
Take courage, weary soul! Look forward to the goal! Joy awaits you.
The race, then, run; your battle done, the crown of glory will be won.

Jesus, all your children cherish, and keep them that they never perish
whom you have purchased with your blood. Let new life to us be given
that we may look to you in heaven whenever fearful is our mood.
Your Spirit on us pour that we may love you more, hearts o'erflowing;
and then shall we, from sin set free, sing praise through all eternity.

SERMON

NICENE CREED

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one being with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation, he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and became truly human. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate. He suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who in unity with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets. We believe in one holy Christian and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.

PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Eternal Lord, give us peace as we ponder the good news that you forgive our sins in Christ. Lead us to see clearly the path you have laid out for us.
Work in us so that we believe and live the Word we have heard today.

Provide courage and compassion to all who preach and teach your Word. Fill them with a love like yours as they proclaim your grace to us and all people.

Move us to love all ministers of the Word wherever they serve.

Guard and guide the families of our congregation. Lead husbands and wives to love each other with commitment, respect, and patience. Help parents to grasp the eternal value of keeping their children close to Jesus all their lives. Grant joy to those who are single, and make them a blessing to others.

Protect us from the temptations that surround us; give us pure hearts and minds.

Provide wisdom and insight to those who make laws and set policies. Give us respect for those who protect us from crime. Lead us to value the rights of our fellow citizens and to defend those who cannot defend themselves.

Bless our land with peace and prosperity so that the gospel may be proclaimed to all.

Give us passion to share the story of your love with our family and friends. Overcome unbelief, and open the hearts of people everywhere to believe the good news that Jesus has forgiven their sins and opened the gates of heaven.

Fill us with joy over every sinner who repents and comes to trust in you.

Extend your healing power to those who are sick and suffering in body or mind. [Pour out your special blessing on . . . *here name the person and the cause of the petition.*] Give patience and compassion to all who care for the sick and dying.

Lift the eyes of the distressed to your love in Christ.

Hear us, Lord, as we pray in silence.

Silent prayer

Gracious God, you govern and direct all things and you love all people. Hear our prayers, spoken and silent, and answer them in your wisdom and grace.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

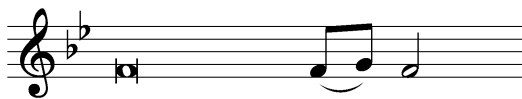
LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

THE SACRAMENT

(Guests, please see our communion practice on page 2.)

(Gluten-free wafers are available; ask Pastor.)



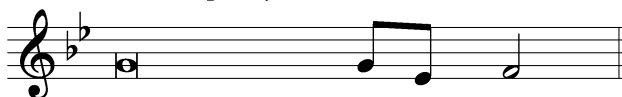
The Lord be with you.



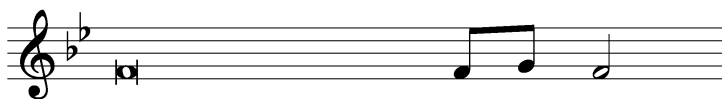
And al - so with you.



Lift up your hearts.



We lift them up to the Lord.



Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.



It is right to give him thanks and praise.

It is truly good and right that we should at all times and in all places give you thanks, O Lord, holy Father, almighty and everlasting God, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who promised that wherever two or three come together in his name, there he is with them to shepherd his flock until he comes again in glory. Therefore, with all the saints on earth and hosts of heaven, we praise your holy name and join their glorious song:

HOLY, HOLY, HOLY

Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power, God of might.

Heaven and earth are full of your glory.

Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

Hosanna in the highest, hosanna in the highest!

WORDS OF INSTITUTION

Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night he was betrayed, took bread; and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my T body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

Then he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; this is my T blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me."

The peace of the Lord be with you always.

Amen.

JESUS, LAMB OF GOD

Jesus, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world; have mercy on us.
Jesus, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world; have mercy on us.
Jesus, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world; grant us your
peace.

DISTRIBUTION HYMN

"I Walk in Danger All the Way"

Hymn 836

I walk in danger all the way; the thought shall never leave me
that Satan, who has marked his prey, is plotting to deceive me.
This foe with hidden snares may seize me unawares
if e'er I fail to watch and pray; I walk in danger all the way.

I pass through trials all the way, with sin and ills contending;
in patience I must bear each day the cross of God's own sending.
Oft in adversity I know not where to flee,
when storms of woe my soul dismay; I pass through trials all the way.

Grim death pursues me all the way, nowhere I rest securely;
he comes by night, he comes by day, he takes his prey most surely.
A failing breath, and I in death's strong grasp may lie
to face eternity today; grim death pursues me all the way.

I walk with angels all the way, they shield me and befriend me;
all Satan's pow'r is held at bay when heav'nly hosts attend me.
They are my sure defense; all fear and sorrow, hence!
Unharm'd by foes, do what they may, I walk with angels all the way.

I walk with Jesus all the way, his guidance never fails me;
within his wounds I find a stay when Satan's pow'r assails me;
and by his footsteps led, my path I safely tread.
No evil leads my soul astray; I walk with Jesus all the way.

My walk is heav'nward all the way; await, my soul, the morrow,
when you at last with joy can sayfarewell to sin and sorrow.
All worldly pomp, begone! To heav'n I now press on.
For all the world I would not stay; my walk is heav'nward all the way.

CLOSING PRAYER

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
his mercy endures forever.

Whenever we eat this bread and drink this cup,
we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

We give you thanks, O Lord, for the foretaste of the heavenly banquet you
have given us in this Sacrament. Through this gift you have fed our faith,
nourished our hope, and strengthened our love.

By your Spirit, help us to live as your holy people until that day when you
will receive us as your guests at the wedding supper of the Lamb, who
lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.
Amen.

BLESSING

The Lord bless you and keep you.
The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you.
The Lord look on you with favor and give you peace. **Amen.**

CLOSING HYMN

"Fight the Good Fight"

Hymn 876

Fight the good fight with all your might;
Christ is your strength and Christ your right.
Lay hold on life, and it shall be your joy and crown eternally.

Run the straight race through God's good grace;
lift up your eyes and seek his face.
Life with its way before us lies; Christ is the path and Christ the prize.

Cast care aside, lean on your guide; his boundless mercy will provide.
Lean, and the trusting soul shall prove Christ is its life and Christ its love.

Faint not nor fear, his arms are near; he changes not, and you are dear.
Only believe, and you will see that Christ is Lord eternally.

OFFERING

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