

## August 9, 2020

1 Kgs 19:19a, 11-13a; Rom 9:1-15, Mt 14:22-33

There is a deep connection between the story of Jesus walking on the water (and Peter trying to do the same) and the story of Elijah encountering God in a cave on a mountain. They both have something to say about how we approach the difficulties of life, and how we allow God to show us the way to a more safe and secure place.

In both stories there is danger and stress going on. Do you know how Elijah winds up in that cave? He was on the run. The evil queen Jezebel had vowed that she would have him killed, and he ran away. In our story today he is at his wits end not knowing where to go next and is waiting for God to tell him what to do. ... In the Gospel the disciples are out fishing - and there is this really bad storm hitting them; they are afraid, they must have been praying to God for help. One scared man waiting in a cave for God, one group of scared men in a boat hoping for God to save them. God comes into both of these scenes - as God comes to us in the fears and storms of our life. When we are in times of worry and not knowing what to do next - God will try to come to us. But will we recognize God when he arrives?

We can also ask if the people in the scripture accounts recognized God? In the first story there are lots of “voices” that Elijah hears that might be God. There are loud and powerful voices - voices that seem like they must be God because they come in a way that people typically expect God to come - with power and force to make a big change and wipe out the problem. But Elijah does not move when he hears wind, earthquake, or fire. We read: *After the fire there was a tiny whispering sound. When he heard this, Elijah hid his face in his cloak and went and stood at the entrance of the cave.* Elijah goes to the entrance of the cave to meet God, God speaks to him and tells him exactly what to do. He follows God’s directions and he is saved. Elijah knew that often God comes in ways that we don’t expect, and with a quiet voice.

In the Gospel, Jesus comes walking on the water and the disciples don’t recognize him. They think he is a ghost, and Peter says *If it is you* - he is not sure. God comes to them and they are not sure - they lack the sight to tell the real God from a fake image. Why did Elijah have the wisdom to know where the real God was and the others couldn’t pick out Jesus from all the other distracting things going on? The difference is the mountain. ... Elijah was on the

mountain in prayer before God came, but the disciples didn't go with Jesus to the mountain when he went to pray. Fishing was a good thing, but they skipped the mountain. When it comes to figuring out the voice of God - Elijah on the mountain gets it right, and when it comes to dealing with the storm, the disciples are confused. The mountain represents taking time to be with the Lord in prayer, to learn to hear God's voice, to learn to recognize God amid all the other voices, amid all the false images of God in our world. Prayer and study helps us to realize that God does not always sound or look like we expect, and God doesn't always act like we expect either.

In the first story, the voice of God does not act like we might expect - no big power play, just a quiet voice. The great and all-powerful God sometimes comes as a gentle whisper in our heart, a calm and peaceful realization in our minds. If we don't learn to hear that voice as Elijah did, then we may go the wrong way and make some missteps. Speaking of missteps, look at Peter! Whose bright idea was it to get out of the boat and walk on the water ... Peter's! Jesus does not tell him to do it. Jesus must have known that his faith was weak and he would sink. So why didn't he stop him? Why didn't he say "No, no, your not ready for that yet"? I remember this comedian who was talking about how different parents teach their children. When a kid is heading to an electrical socket, one parent will say "Stop that! Come over here right now! Don't you dare touch that!" - the other will say "Go ahead." His point being that sometimes we need to try it our own way to see that it does not work - we learn something from the trial and failure that we cannot learn from being rescued. Jesus knows this. When he doesn't stop the storm immediately, when we try to walk on water and sink, maybe he is trying to teach us something.

God does not bail out Elijah before he goes through a lot of hardships that actually only strengthen him. Jesus only saves Peter after he calls out to him amid his failure, amid his fear, amid his own desires to do something others couldn't. If God does not sound or act as you think, it may be that you have not learned to hear the voice, or that God needs to teach you something that you can only learn by sinking. But don't be worried - if you follow him as Elijah and Peter eventually did, if you go to the mountain to learn to hear the voice of God and recognize that his ways are not our ways, then just like Elijah and Peter you will eventually be saved. The hand of Jesus is there for all who would reach out to take it - his voice is there to hear if you train your ear, and no matter what it seems - there is always sense in what God is doing.