

June 19, 2022
Second Sunday after Pentecost

Meditation: "Ever With Us"

When I read the lesson for today, I thought to myself, Dear God, do you not know that this is Father's day and that we have a confirmation to celebrate, and this is the scripture lesson? As soon as I thought it, I wondered if it was a really stupid thing to think. And then I wondered if I had turned into my father. You see, for an educated man, he sure could ask some stupid questions at times. I remember a time when I was learning to ride a bike and I fell off and skinned my knees and hands on the pavement, and he asked, "Why did you do that?" Is that not the most stupid question to ask a child who has come into the house bleeding and crying? Why did I fall? Had he never heard of gravity?

Speaking of stupid questions, even God seems to ask them from time to time. Like the question in today's scripture lesson. Let me set the scene.

Ahab has become king over Israel. He married Jezebel, the daughter of King Ethbaal of Sidon. And Ahab worships the gods of the Sidonians, Baal. And he built an altar for Baal and he also erected a sacred pole to the goddess of fertility, Ashera. Jezebel, Ahab's wife and queen of Israel had all of the prophets of the Lord God killed.....all except Elijah, who escaped to Zarephath in Sidon. After three years of drought, Elijah returns to Israel and asks Obadiah, who was in charge of the palace, to bring Ahab to him.

A test is arranged: 450 prophets of Baal will meet Elijah on Mount Carmel. Each will be given a bull to prepare as a burnt offering, but they shall not light the wood on fire. Instead, they will call on their respective god to start the fire. The prophets of Baal go first, and after a day of calling on Baal, nothing happens. Then it's Elijah's turn. When all is ready, he asks the people to douse the prepared bull and the firewood with water, and then he calls on God. Everything is incinerated – the wood, the bull, the stone altar, even the water that has collected in a moat around the altar.

Elijah calls for the arrest of the prophets of Baal, and takes them to the Wadi Kishon where he kills them all. The drought ends, and Ahab returns to Jezebel, where he tells her..... well, we just heard that part.... Jezebel is fit to be tied, because Elijah has killed all of the prophets of her god, Baal, and she wants revenge. Elijah flees for his life.

Eventually he arrives at Mount Horeb, and then, in good time, God starts asking this really stupid question: “What are you doing here, Elijah?” What are you doing here? Really? It was God’s own messenger who appeared to Elijah in the wilderness, a day’s journey past Beer-sheba, and provided him with bread and water, not once, but twice, and then sent him on his way to Mount Horeb. What are you doing here?

So, is the question really a stupid question? Or is the question a test? Does God really not know why Elijah is there? Or is God asking Elijah if Elijah knows why he is there? The prophets of Baal are no more. The act of God on Mount Horeb, in the sight of the people of Israel, has proven that Ahab has led the people astray. Ahab’s days are numbered. Why is Elijah on Mount Horeb, meeting with God? I think he’s there for a couple of reasons.

The first reason he’s there is to be reminded that God sent him to Zarephath to keep him safe from Jezebel’s killing spree of the prophets of God. Elijah is there to be reminded that God incinerated the wood, the burnt offering, the altar stones, and the water when Elijah called on God. Elijah is there to be reminded that God has been with Elijah all along, watching out for him, providing for his needs, protecting him.

I wonder if that is what was behind my father’s question. Not, why did I fall off my bike and hurt myself, but why would I want to hurt myself? Maybe, in his own backward way, he was showing that he cared about me and what happened to me.

Oh yeah. I said there were reasons why I thought Elijah was there on Mount Horeb, and then I only gave one. So the second reason I think Elijah was there was because Ahab’s days were numbered and it was time for a regime change. Elijah was there to get his next assignment – to go and anoint a new king, Jehu, son of Nimshi, and, while he was at it, anoint Hazael as king of Aram, and Elisha as Elijah’s successor. Anointing a new king while there is still one on the throne is a dangerous thing to do.

So, what can we learn from all of this, and how does any of this possibly tie into confirmation?

It seems obvious that God was with Elijah, in good times, and in times of want. That God watched over Elijah, provided for him, protected him, cared for him, even when God also called on Elijah to do dangerous, potentially life-threatening things.

So it is with each and every one of us. Sometimes God calls us to do difficult, even seemingly impossible, even sometimes dangerous things in our lives. AND God is always with us, watching over us, providing for us, protecting us, caring for us.

As Sammy is confirmed into the body of Christ, he is taking the next step in his faith journey. There will be times in his life when he will need God to watch over and protect him. There will be times when he will need God to provide for him. There will be times when God will call on him to do things that he could never have imagined doing. There will be good and easy times, and there will be challenging times, and throughout it all God will be with Sammy, whether Sammy knows it at the time, or not.

The same is true for me. The same is true for you. God is ever with us all. Thanks be to God.