

I Kings 19:1-21 Pat's paraphrase:

Elijah had a great victory. The people and especially the priests that worshiped the god Baal saw that our God was powerful and listened to the concerns of God's people.

But then the queen, Jezebel heard that Elijah had won the battle and she said :
"Give this message to Elijah ' I'm going to kill you!"

So Elijah became afraid. He ran away. He ran for 40 days and 40 nights until he came to a mountain named Horeb- the mountain of God. He went into a cave and spent the night there.

But the Lord said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

Elijah replied, "I have zealously served the Lord God Almighty. But the people of Israel have broken their covenant with you, torn down your altars, and killed every one of your prophets. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me, too."

"Go out and stand before me on the mountain," the Lord told him. And as Elijah stood there, the Lord passed by, and a mighty **wind** hit the mountain. It was such a terrible blast that the rocks were torn loose, but the Lord was not in the **wind**.
After the **wind**

there was an **earthquake**, but the Lord was not in the **earthquake**. And after the **earthquake**

there was a **fire**, but the Lord was not in the **fire**. And after the **fire** there was the sound of a

gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave.

And a voice said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

He replied again, "I have served the Lord God Almighty. But the people of Israel have broken their promises to you. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me, too."

Then the Lord told him, "Go back the same way you came, anoint Hazael to be king of Arameans. And anoint Jehu to be king of Israelites, and anoint Elisha to replace you as my prophet. I will save 7,000 others in Israel who have never bowed down to Baal." This is the word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God!**

I will always remember the first time I told this story to children. I was teaching Sunday School to a group of first and second grade boys. It was one of those years that happens sometimes in churches. It wasn't that there was also a group of first and second grade girls, but our church only had boys in that age group. It must have been at least 25 years ago. Those boys are all now grown men with children. Amazing.

But when I told this story of Elijah and they said something they had never said before: "Tell it again". So I did. Kids love being able to act out a story. Even big kids like you will remember the power of God demonstrated in this story.

God knew where Elijah was. God knew what Elijah was afraid of. God knew that often followers will expect God to act in certain ways. There's a great little study of Habakkuk called "Why doesn't God act more like God?" by David Bast. Of course the answer is that God always acts like God but we have our own ideas of how we think God should act. So did Elijah. He had seen the power of God. But he was afraid of the wicked queen Jezebel. He didn't want this challenge to his faith.

But directly before this account God had sent fire down from heaven to demonstrate authority as the God above all gods. And God sent wind and rain when there had been a severe drought. The narratives of the Old Testament are in our Bible because they teach us about God. They have been used for the 1000s of years for God's people to teach their children the ways and means of God. Maybe they are historical and surely they are educational.

For a long time they were an oral tradition, told to each new generation. Then they became written and the young Hebrew people learned these stories from their parents, grandparents, family and rabbis. And so they learned to have faith in God. "Spiritual formation". They learned to have faith when they saw God displaying amazing power and authority, and even when they didn't. God's power was evident when the earth shook. God's presence is obvious in a gentle whisper or even in silence.

Many of you can relate to this message of this passage in I Kings, about God coming in amazing and powerful or even in amazing and subtle ways. To be sure we mostly see God in subtle ways. If we prayed and fire usually came down from heaven or the sea parted, or the drought was ended we probably would pray more! But we wouldn't have faith, it would be sight.

Some of you are like Elijah. There is another point in this Biblical text, one that we often overlook. One I didn't press with the children. Elijah had great victories for God. He facilitated awesome displays of God's power. It would be helpful if you read the previous chapters in I Kings to get a good handle on the events before the cave at Mt. Horeb, down in the Sinai Peninsula. When God said: "What are you doing here Elijah?" God had already demonstrated authority over the earth and sky by knocking down the false prophets and idols.

Elijah saw and felt and heard the power God had. But he was still afraid and lonely. For before the earthquake wind and fire; before the still small voice of calm, Elijah said: "I'm the only one left. I'm alone and I might as well be dead."

So God orchestrated the earthquake, wind and fire. God passed near to Elijah with that still small voice of calm... When God said again: "What are you doing here Elijah?" And Elijah said: "I'm the only one left. I'm alone and I might as well be dead."

What? Wait! God was obviously present and powerful and yet Elijah still was lonely and afraid? Yes. That's the point. Well one of the points.

God's people are often lonely and afraid. That's not sin, that's being human with emotions. We know with our faith that God is powerful and nearby. But we know in our minds from circumstances that we don't know what comes next. So sometimes we are lonely and are afraid.

But our teacher today, the prophet Elijah was more than afraid. He was more than lonely. He was irrational. He was seriously confused in his thoughts and was not seeing his life accurately.

God said: "What are you doing here Elijah?" Twice. And maybe you'd think that after an awesome display of God's authority Elijah would have been assured. But he wasn't. Both times Elijah's response was "I'm the only one left. I'm alone and I might as well be dead."

And God tries to make a correction to Elijah's thinking. "Go back. The 40 days and night travel. Hazael is there. He is to be a king for my people, the Arameans. Jehu is there; he's to be king over the Israelites. Elisha is there, and he will be your successor as prophet for my people. Oh, and by the way- there are 7,000 people in Israel who don't follow the false gods."

Seven thousand people! Elijah thought he was alone, and God says there are "7000 people who believe like you!"

Elijah was DEPRESSED. Depression is real and it is characterized by the overwhelming feelings that Elijah had. Fear, loneliness and the certain feeling that there is no way that life can get better. Helpless, hopeless, worthless. Better off dead.

Most people have felt sad or depressed at times. Feeling depressed can be a normal reaction to loss, life's struggles, or an injured self-esteem. But when feelings of intense sadness -- including feeling *helpless, hopeless, and worthless* -- last for days to weeks and keep you from functioning normally, your mood may be something more than sadness. It may very well be clinical depression -- a treatable medical condition.

According to the DSM-IV a manual used to diagnose mental health concerns, depression occurs when you have at least five of the following nine symptoms at the same time. Most days you have:

- a depressed mood, particularly in the morning
- fatigue or loss of energy
- feelings of worthlessness or guilt
- impaired concentration, indecisiveness
- insomnia or hypersomnia (excessive sleeping)
- markedly diminished interest or pleasure in almost all activities
- recurring thoughts of death or suicide (not just fearing death)
- a sense of restlessness or of being slowed down
- significant weight loss or gain (5% in one month)

In the U.S., about 14.8 million adults suffer from major depression, according to the National Institute of Mental Health. No one is immune, and not all the variables are understood. And it's not just adults.

“Childhood depression is different from the normal "blues" and everyday emotions that occur as a child develops. If your child is sad, this does not necessarily mean he or she has significant depression. It's when the sadness becomes persistent -- day after day -- that depression may be an issue. Or, if your child has disruptive behavior that interferes with normal social activities, interests, schoolwork, or family life, it may indicate that he or she has a depressive illness. Keep in mind that while depression is a serious illness, it is also a treatable one.” (Webmd.com)

What about depression in teens?

It is common for teens to occasionally feel unhappy. However, when the unhappiness lasts for more than two weeks and the teen experiences other symptoms of depression, then he or she may be suffering from adolescent depression. As many as one in every 33 children and one in eight adolescents suffer with depression. Talk to your doctor to find out if your teen may be depressed. There is effective treatment available to help teens move beyond depression as they grow older.

Unfortunately, most people with clinical depression never seek treatment. Left undiagnosed and untreated, depression can worsen, lasting for years and causing untold suffering, and possibly suicide.

The suicide risk in people with major depression is the highest for any mental health situation. For people between the ages of 10 and 24, suicide is the third leading cause of death. Happy Mother's Day!? Parents have a huge

responsibility. I thank God and pray for you! And remind us that as a covenant community we have promised to help.

Maybe some of you have had to deal with the loss of a friend or loved one through suicide. A couple years after high school graduation one of my best school buddies died. There was no doubt; he intentionally took his life. I still struggle with that. He was a talented, smart, fun-loving Christian young man. He was attending college, had a strong family and a circle of friends. Some say he was questioning his identity. I don't know. But I do know that I wish it was different. I would love to know him now, as a middle-aged man. And I wouldn't want anyone to suffer like his parents did.

But wait, there's more. In the United States the rate of suicide *increases* with age. I wouldn't have believed it if I hadn't seen the statistics. In the United States we have TWICE as many suicides as homicides. And the highest risk of suicide is in older Americans, when the helpless, hopeless, worthless feelings intensify. It's not just the teens.

So let me tell you all. You are loved. God loves you. The leadership of this church loves you. And although sometimes we feel helpless, hopeless or worthless I never want to grieve the loss of anyone else because those feelings won over the knowing that you are loved. I want love to win. If you are depressed or think someone you know is depressed- look for help, Now.

In Heaven's Eyes lyrics, sung Sandi Patti 1985.

A fervent prayer rose up to heaven, a fragile soul is losing ground.
Sorting through this earthly babble, heaven heard the sound.
This was a life of no distinction, no successes, only tries.
Yet gazing down on this unlovely one, there was love in heaven's eyes.

In heaven's eyes, there are no losers, in heaven's eyes no hopeless cause.
Only people like you with feelings like me,
amazed by the grace that we can find
In heaven's eyes.

Prayer:

God of life, God of comfort:
alone, afraid,
in fear, in loss,
we cry out: "Why, O Lord, why?"
"How long, O Lord, how long?"
We cling to you in hope
even as we grasp for hope.
So grasp us in your loving embrace
through Jesus Christ,
who endured the cross for our sake. **Amen.**