

“What are you doing here, Elijah?”

It’s almost summer, Trinity Sunday is past, and for the next five months we will be delving into the prophets in our Old Testament readings. This season after Pentecost is sometimes called “ordinary time,” which refers to ordinals—that is, numbers counting the Sundays; but thinking of the time as “ordinary” as in “normal” has always struck a chord with me. It’s not Advent or Christmas or Lent or Easter. It’s ordinary. This isn’t to say that Sundays and church aren’t special. Of course they are! But we are now in the ordinary long green season after Pentecost, when instead of anticipating Jesus or celebrating his birth or anticipating his resurrection or celebrating his resurrection or anticipating the Holy Spirit or celebrating the coming of the Holy Spirit – instead of all that, we are remembering the everyday stuff he said and did when he walked the earth, and we also focus on certain stories in the Old Testament. Last summer we talked about Israel’s struggle with kings during ordinary time. Next summer, we will look at stories from Genesis and Exodus in ordinary time. This summer, we focus on the prophets.

Here in the U.S. in 2022, today is “Juneteenth,” when we commemorate enslaved people in Texas in 1865 finally learning that they were free, two full months after the end of the Civil War and two and a half years after the Emancipation Proclamation. It’s hard to fathom that the word would have taken so long to travel, considering how quickly we can now learn about news events online, especially on social media.

Juneteenth is an appropriate way to kick off the long green season of the prophets, because in our biblical context, prophets are not people who predict the future. Biblical prophets advocated for what we today call social justice. Prophets had a special relationship with God and would call God’s people back into relationship with God when they turned away.

Prophets spoke truth to power, warning rulers when they went astray. King Ahab and Queen Jezebel had gone astray, worshipping Baal instead of God. Elijah called them back to the true path through a deadly confrontation with the prophets of Baal. Now Queen Jezebel threatened to do to Elijah what he had done to Baal’s prophets. Elijah fled for his life before sitting under a broom tree and praying for death.

God did not send death but two nights of rest as well as an angel who gave Elijah enough food that he was then able to make his way to Horeb, the mount of God, where he spent the night in a cave. Horeb was the same sacred place where Moses encountered the burning bush and where God made a covenant with God’s people.

God’s word came to Elijah in that cave in Horeb. God asked, “What are you doing here, Elijah?”

I hear that question from time to time in my own spiritual life. What are you doing here, Elijah? I don’t know if it resonates so much with me because Elijah and Elizabeth start with the same three letters. Or maybe because I so often feel that I am seeking God but have no idea what I am doing. I don’t think it’s either of those things completely. I think the question resonates with me because after Elijah answers the question, God passes by, not in the great wind or the earthquake or the fire, but in the *sound of sheer silence*.

I feel that in some ways, some of us who are here at St. David's on this Juneteenth Sunday in 2022 are living in a sound of sheer silence. We've gathered in this holy place this morning. As a church community we've been through wind and earthquake and fire with the pandemic and a series of difficult situations, and now we are facing a long green summer and season and a sound of sheer silence. Will we recognize God passing by?

What are you doing here, Elijah?

God asks the same question after passing by, and Elijah gives exactly the same answer he gave before God passed by. Elijah says, again, that he has been zealous for the Lord, and that after his showdown with prophets of Baal, "I alone am left," he says, "and they are seeking my life, to take it away."

Elijah is afraid. God passing by has not lessened his fear. Elijah is afraid, yet he continues to seek God even through his fear. But Elijah is weary. Weary, and faithful.

The way the reading ended this morning might make it sound like God is responding, "I don't care that you are weary. Keep going." But that's just because of where it ends. In the next breath, in verses that are not in today's passage, God sends Elijah to not only anoint a new king but also a successor to himself. Elijah is no longer alone: he gets Elisha, who accompanies Elijah and eventually takes up Elijah's mantle.

Do you feel alone? We are living in such difficult times, and many of us feel alone. We may feel that way about church as well, like we are the only ones doing any work. I know some of you feel that way. Fewer people are taking on more things. We printed fewer bulletins this week as attendance dwindles for summer. Do you ever want to say to God, "I alone am left, and I'm just so tired?"

Do you ever hear God asking, *What are you doing here, my prophet?*

We are not alone. In this season after Pentecost, we can remember Jesus' words about not leaving us comfortless. We can remember from last Sunday's reading that hope does not disappoint. God will send us what we need. God hears us when we cry out. The Holy Spirit is with us in these so-called ordinary times after Pentecost, after the spirit came down like a rush of violent wind.

God is with us in the sheer silence.

When God asks, "What are you doing here," how will you answer?