

10 Pentecost, Proper 14, Yr. A

August 9, 2020

1 Kings 19:9-18, Psalm 85, Matthew 14:22-33

I'd like to start with the collect this morning, in which we pray that the Lord will grant us the spirit to think and do what's right in order that we may be enabled to live according to God's will. It also says that we can't accomplish this without God's help. So in that one little prayer, we acknowledge that we're here to do God's will, to make the kingdom come, but that we need help to do that.

I remember that long-ago memorized catechism question and answer. The question was, WHY DID GOD MAKE ME? And the answer was, TO KNOW, LOVE AND SERVE GOD IN THIS WORLD AND TO BE HAPPY WITH HIM IN THE NEXT. I'm sure you all remember something similar. We're here, not just willy-nilly, but we are created for a purpose. Last week I mentioned the idea that my friend said she thought God was like a magnet, pulling us toward himself. And pulling us toward that kind of life that will enable us to become the people God wants us to be. The ones mentioned in the Collect. The ones that live in such a way as to facilitate the coming of the Kingdom.

We're asking for help and one great help that we have is the Bible. It comforts us, but it also teaches us and challenges us. This morning's psalm with those lovely

images of that kingdom where mercy and truth have met together, where righteousness and peace have kissed each other reminds us of what we're about. And Paul does the same by telling us that our search for righteousness or for salvation, we don't have to ascend to heaven or descend into the abyss because, he says, THE WORD IS NEAR YOU, ON YOUR LIPS AND IN YOUR HEART. We have what we need: we have the vision, so we know where we're going, we have that Word, whether we think of that as the Bible or as Christ, and we have God's presence as well as one another as companions on the way.

I'd like us to think about the Bible this morning and how it's an aid on this journey we're all on. Many of you have participated in what's called the African Bible study, or maybe you have instead done Lectio Divina. They are similar in that they ask you to read a Biblical passage prayerfully and then to be aware of what part of the passage stands out for you. If you do this over time, you'll notice that that will change as you change and mature. Typically, what stands out is something that is particularly meaningful to you at that time. It's often something you are wrestling with or wondering about. It's all part of our spiritual journey.

This journey toward spiritual maturity can be compared to all those other studies in the area of human development, like psychological or cognitive or moral stages. I'd like us

to look at the Elijah and Matthew readings this morning and see how that works.

Starting with Elijah, you may remember the back story. Elijah was in a contest with the priests of Baal to see whose God was more powerful. They both put their offerings on an altar and called on their god to ignite them. The Baal priests couldn't get it going but Elijah, even after he had thoroughly doused his offerings with water, was able to call down fire. His sacrifice was accomplished. It was pretty spectacular. I remember helping out at VBS one summer when Bruce Foster somehow did a demonstration of this and managed to cook some hamburgers. The kids were duly impressed. I have no idea how he did it! All that was fine, but then for some reason, which would be another sermon entirely, Elijah killed all the Baal prophets. Where we come in today, Queen Jezebel, whose prophets they were, has promised that she's going to do the same to Elijah. So he's hiding out in a cave. You'll remember that the Lord sends an earthquake and fire, but God was in neither of those. Rather he was, the text tells us, in a sound of sheer silence. What do you find most compelling about this text and the earlier story? Is it the calling down of the fire in the contest with the Baal prophets? Or maybe it's the earthquake or fire we read about this morning. What catches me in the reading is the question God puts to Elijah, not once but twice: **WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE, ELIJAH?** Why are you hiding out when you still

have so much to do? Why are you stalled on the path to the Kingdom?

I think we can ask the same question about the Matthew reading. What catches us there? Is it that Jesus was walking on the water? Or that Peter gets out of the boat and tries it himself? Or that he actually was able to accomplish it until he realized what he was doing and, like that cartoon character Wiley Coyote, looked down and lost it? Or is it that as long as he kept his eyes on Jesus he was OK? It will be something different at different times in your life.

I know that at some point, I've shared with you going to a convention with friends and hearing Scott Peck who, it turned out was writing his own book on spiritual growth and how that was accomplished and aided in community. He gave us the simplified version: stage one, it's all about me and only me; stage two, it's about me and my extended circle, my family, my church, my friends; stage three, it's about the individual questioning all received or conventional wisdom and often rejecting that at least for a time; stage four is the synthesis when the person puts it all back together and owns it for him or herself, now living with authenticity and integrity.

I thought of that when I read a book recently titled, *In Over Our Heads*. That certainly connected with what was going on with Peter who was literally over his head. In this case, though, the author, who is a developmental psychologist, writes about his concern that modern living is demanding

so much of us that most of us are in over our heads. If I am reading him correctly, and he's not using this language, so I'm literally putting words in his mouth, I think that he's talking about our call to the kind of Kingdom living Jesus was talking about – that kind of living that requires humility, that asks us to question our own assumptions and our biases, the kind of living that requires intentionality, and self-reflection as well loving connection, recognition of our interdependence, care, compassion, all of it.

This is Kingdom talk – Jesus talk. It's asking us to broaden our vision, to conform our minds to Christ rather than the world, asking us to remember WHY we're here in the first place, asking us how we can know, love and serve God.

My oldest daughter is doing a lot of reading about mystics and prophets and asked if I thought there were still prophets today. Prophets who remind us and redirect us when we get off the path, or sink beneath the waves. And I thought of two: the first is Martin Luther King who said that the “moral arc of the Universe is long, but it bends toward justice.” And the other person I thought of was Teilhard de Chardin, the French Jesuit and paleontologist who said:

SOMEDAY, AFTER MASTERING THE WINDS, THE WAVES, THE TIDES AND GRAVITY, WE SHALL HARNESS FOR GOD THE ENERGIES OF LOVE AND

THEN FOR A SECOND TIME IN THE HISTORY OF THE
WORD, HUMANS WILL HAVE DISCOVERED FIRE.

Yes. Would that that would happen soon! Amen.