

Today in the first lesson, we heard about Poor Elijah. Defeated and scared, he retires under a broom tree and prays for death. And God comes to him and bucks him up.

In the reading we also hear about prophets Elijah puts to death. Do you know how many? Why they were put to death?

It speaks of Jezebel, the villain we all love to hate. But why was she furious? What power did she wield?

And who the heck is Ahab? Didn't he try and kill the whale in Moby Dick?

We get these little partial stories from the Hebrew Scriptures and we have no background, no way to put anything in context, no real idea of what the point of the writing is. But we read it anyway.

It leaves many of us feeling kind of like we were watching an episode of NCIS or Stranger Things, but only tuning in during the final 15 minutes of the show. We can enjoy the action, but we have no knowledge of the full plot—so we try and guess, based on the part of the show we actually saw.

So it is with most Old Testament stories—they drop is in 15 minutes from the end leaving us to try and figure out what it all means with incomplete information.

But it's really impossible. Most of us are not familiar enough with the book of Kings (who IS, really?) At best, we are guessing, filling in the plot with our own imagination.

So let's watch the whole Elijah show from the beginning.

Elijah is a prophet "Yahweh's spokesperson." (*Yahweh* is the word for God in all the places where LORD is capitalized, by the way.) Check your bulletin.

Ahab is the king of Israel. He is married to Jezebel, a woman whose name even now is synonymous with a woman who is a wicked, scheming and unscrupulous.

Anyway—God – YAHWEH—is angry at Ahab for turning from the One God of Israel and worshipping Baal. (Side note—in Seminary we used to make Baal's name into disrespectful plays on words, like "liberty Baal" and "Taco- Baal". Seminarians, huh?)

So- Ahab has become apostate. He has turned his back on God. Jezebel had urged him to do this. She had at her disposal 450 prophets of Baal at her beck and call.

Now, the people of Israel were in a severe drought because God wasn't happy with Ahab and Jezebel's choices, so God sent a drought. A three-year drought. You think our droughts are horrible? Try living in a desert and having a drought. Awful.

Now there was a servant of Ahab the king called Obediah. He was still faithful—in a quiet way—to Yahweh. He had recently saved 100 prophets of Yahweh by hiding them from Ahab in caves.

Elijah and God were pleased, so Obediah didn't die in this next part.

Elijah had Obediah send Ahab to him. Elijah demanded that Ahab bring all the people of Israel and the 450 prophets of Baal to Mount Carmel. He tells the 450 to cut up an Ox on the altar and pray to their God to light it on fire. Elijah will do the same. So they do this, and call and call to Baal. Nothing. Elijah suggests that their God might be meditating, or is possibly on a journey – or even asleep! Who says prophets don't have a sense of humor?

And nothing happens.

So, now, it's Elijah's turn .

He prepares his ox, then has the people of Israel pour water all over the carcass, not once, but 3 times. He calls on Yahweh, and boom! Mic drop: roast beef. The people of Israel are impressed and seriously reconsidering their choice to serve Baal.

Elijah has the people round up the 450 prophets of Baal, and they are executed. Jezebel is really annoyed. She sends Elijah the message that by noon the next day—he will also be dead. And – for whatever reason—Elijah freaks out and goes into hiding. Against the 450 prophets of Baal: courageous! Against the king: strong! Against a woman—terrified. Go figure.

So as we read today, angels ministered to Elijah under the broom tree – telling him to “get up and eat”. Then Elijah meets Yahweh.

Yahweh is bigger and stronger and more mysterious than anything Elijah has encountered previously. God doesn't meet him in any of the things that can destroy people: wind, fire, earthquakes. God meets Elijah in silence.

God does not meet Elijah in his complaints, in his excuses, or even in his wonderous deeds. God meets Elijah in the silence.

Think about that.

Think about all the times we obsess about doing the right thing, following God in the “right” way, the times we rail and complain with righteous indignation about various people around us not doing the right thing, all the times we are scared, or make excuses for why we do (or don't ) do things— and it turns out we are still too focused on ourselves.

God wants us to shut up. Not forever, mind you. But *occasionally*.

Instead of thinking about ourselves—what we should do, what we shouldn't do--sometimes it's more important to regularly just sit in the presence of God. Not praying. Not thinking. Not worrying. Not planning. Just being still in the presence of God. Just think: for maybe 10 or 20 minutes WE are not responsible for the world.

God is. In all of it. With all of us. Every moment.

Perhaps this is message of this convoluted story. Now we *might* have been able to figure out this message from just the 15 minutes at the end of the story, but now that we all know the whole story, how Elijah always felt responsible and needed to constantly do the right thing, all the while encountering roadblocks and anger—can't we more easily put ourselves in his shoes, understand those feelings?

I mean, haven't we sometimes felt like we try and do and do for God, please him, do God's will, and sometimes still feel like it's too hard and we can't go on?

It's then that God will appear. And God is not in the things that shake us, or the tempests of life or even the things that make us burn—but he is there with us. Silently standing with us.

And we can just pause. Let God's peace and hush wash over us. We can sit in the silence of God, not talking, not doing, but letting God be in charge – even it's only for 10 or 15 minutes a day. God is there, comforting us like a heavy blanket. Or a strong Father's arms, holding us until we are ready to do God's next thing. Amen.