

I, Even I Only, Am Left

Proper 8/6afterPent

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1 Ki. 19:9b-21

Grace, peace, and mercy be to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

There is an invisible battle going on right now. The hard thing about this battle is that it takes place in visible, physical locations. It can also be misleading, attempting to make it look as though physical actors and actresses are involved when it is not the characters with whom we should be concerned, but the invisible forces. The cosmic, invisible, evil forces in league with Satan and his fellow fallen angels and demons.

There are ways to fight these forces. You all saw one this morning. A child was brought to the waters of the font of Holy Baptism. Luther, a fellow fighter of the faith, is pretty well known for saying that when a child is brought to baptism, the child is put to death. The sinful, invisible part of the child. Then, a new person is raised out of the font. A fellow believer. Again, as Luther has put it before, a fellow target.

We have all been made a royal priesthood in Christ Jesus through the washing of Holy Baptism in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. But unlike the royalty of fairy tales that live in the life of luxury, we have been made targets. Each of you have likely already found this to be true as you've lived as the new person who came out of the font of your baptism.

Our lives are as new creations who have a battle to wage against the invisible enemies. Some battles have been won outright. Others have perhaps been ones which had to be retreated to be completed another day. But you are still here. You are still coming to hear the Word of God, so the battle is far from lost.

Nevertheless, there may be those times that it feels that the battle has been lost, or, at the very least, that the invisible enemies are winning and have you surrounded. That is precisely how Elijah felt in our Old Testament text this morning. But, as we'll find in his account, and in our own, the battle belongs to the Lord. In Christ Jesus, we are more than conquerors.

Verse 1

In order to properly understand this account about Elijah, we must remember what happened before our text begins. In the eighteenth chapter of 1 Kings, just before our text, we have recorded for us a battle waged by God through Elijah against the invisible spiritual forces of Baal. Elijah puts the prophets of Baal to the test. He encourages them to build a stack of wood with bulls upon it, and he would do the same. Then he would let them pray to Baal first that Baal, if he existed, would send fire to burn up the bulls. The prophets of Baal pray and sing, finally even going so far as cutting themselves, all without response. Elijah even mocks them, asking, "Where is Baal? Is he sleeping?" Finally Elijah tells them Baal has had his chance. He drenches his bulls and wood with water, and then prays to the Lord God. God sends such a fire that it consumes the bulls and the wood, despite them being damp.

What a display of faith! To take on several false god prophets alone! And yet, Elijah through the Lord wins. The witnesses all see that Baal does not exist and that the Lord, the God of Israel, not only exists, but can and does act.

Has there been a time, or perhaps even a few, where God has demonstrated His presence in your life? Has God ever acted in such a way that there was no other explanation than it must have been the Lord acting for you? Granted, this is harder to see these days when the Lord no longer speaks to us through the prophets but through His Son Jesus Christ, that is, through the Word about Him in the Church. At the same time, hindsight

can sometimes show the Lord's work in ways that could never have been imagined while you or I were going through the event.

Yet, this is a war—a war which will not be completed until Christ Jesus returns from heaven. Like all wars, there are battles which are easier fought and those which are harder fought, and sometimes even retreated. That's where Elijah found himself in our text this morning. Despite such a tremendous victory for the Lord against the prophets of Baal, he came home to learn that the queen, Jezebel, wanted his head—not to bless it, but taken off. And so, closely following his victory, Elijah found himself running for his life. He made his way toward Mount Horeb, the mountain of the Lord. When he arrived, he took shelter in a cave, where the Lord found him.

Verse 2

“(B)ehold, the word of the Lord came to him, and he said to him, ‘What are you doing here, Elijah?’ He said, ‘I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away.’”

Life ebbs and it flows. There are sometimes really high points, and then there are those times when things become excessively challenging. It is a fact not only for life in general, but especially for the life of faith. From baptism, we have a target on us, and Satan does everything he can to make us doubt, to distrust God, and to fear that some sin or sins are so great that God could not possibly have forgiven them.

We can see the doubt in Elijah as he flees from Jezebel. He just had his mountaintop experience against the prophets of Baal, and then he had learned of the warrant for his death and he fled. But, despite his fear, where does he go? He goes to Horeb, the mountain of God. He ran *toward* the Lord.

There, at the mountain of God, God spoke to him, “‘What are you doing here, Elijah?’” The loving question of a Father to a son. The question and Elijah's response actually come twice. Once before the wind, the earthquake, the fire, and the whisper, and a second time afterward. Then Elijah's fears are expressed, “‘I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away.’”

How often might we feel the same? Can you count the number of hot topics there are today: creation and evolution, pro-life or pro-choice—who will be the next president? Whether it is in the workforce, or at home, or in the hospital, you can, and in some cases, do run across those of a different faith or even no faith at all. Sometimes they outnumber you, or sometimes it may be their position that leads you to fear or doubt. Perhaps a boss, perhaps a president, there are any number of places you might find yourself fearing and feeling like Elijah: “‘I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away.’”

Verse 3

But then the words of comfort. “‘Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus. And when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael to be king over Syria. And Jehu, the son of Nimshi you shall anoint to be king over Israel, and Elisha the son of Shephat of Abel-meholah you shall anoint to be prophet in your place...Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him.’”

Elijah was not alone. There were seven thousand fellow believers—seven thousand who had not followed after Baal! Just a few weeks ago, we heard from our sister in Christ that we are not alone, either. There are two million LCMS Christians here in these United States, and four million more in Madagascar. But what is more, we know that God is for us, as our loving Father. We know this because of His Son, Jesus, whose other name is Immanuel. Immanuel means God with us. God is both for us and with us because of His Son, Jesus Christ, who took the condemnation we rightly deserve to the cross of Calvary. He paid for it there—not in part, but in whole.

Yes, the condemnation that you and I rightly deserve has been paid. Now we are children of God. Yet we retain those targets on our backs. Satan has lost at Calvary and he wants to make us doubt and ignore what happened at Calvary so that we might lose with him. So we continue to wage war and fight the fight of faith—not against our brothers and sisters of the flesh, but against the invisible enemies: sin, death, and the devil.

But even that is not the end of Elijah's account, or our own. When Elijah had completed the work that the Lord had prepared for him, the Lord allowed him to pass on the mantle of prophet to Elisha. Elijah would be called home as a good and faithful servant. Today, that is our hope as well—to be found a good and faithful servant in Christ Jesus. Note that our hope is to be called home as faithful, not sinless or successful, just faithful. We are not sinless except by the death and resurrection of Christ, and while we may teach others and bring others to the Church, they may or not continue in the faith. Our calling is to invite, whether they listen or they do not. So continue to fight the good fight against the invisible forces. Fight the good fight against doubt and fear. God is not against you but for you and with you, in His Son, Jesus the Christ, and through the power of His Holy Spirit. In Jesus' Name. Amen.