

June 7, 2020 We Are Witnesses Pt. 8 1Kings 19:13b-21

Dearly Beloved, Servants of Jesus, Children of the Church;

Back in mid-March, I must admit I had no idea that come summer we would not be meeting in the sanctuary. I was naïve. It was my first experience of a world wide plague. I looked up the word naïve in my Oxford Dictionary. You know I do that from time to time. Words are tools, and for the most part they are precise tools. Under the listing for naïve was the definition, “unconsciously and amusingly simple.” The shoe fits. I was unaware of how “simple” I could be. I would tell you that I have laughed at myself, but the fact is I am more moved to tears. I miss you. I miss worship. I miss worship in the sanctuary, singing under the leadership of Sherry Mayhew with our choir and congregation. I miss the affection we have shared in the midst of living faith-in-Jesus together. I am not depressed but I am super aware of how good we (I) have had it these past 9 and a half years, and more than 40 before that, and most of the 75 I am. This is June the 7<sup>th</sup>. For the first time in my life, the General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church In Canada is not gathering to meet this evening. It is the first Sunday in June and we cannot be together to celebrate communion, so, I urge you to do this: take a glass of wine or juice, a piece of bread or cake, break it and say...this is the broken body of Jesus...then eat it, followed by....this is the shed blood of Jesus that saves...and then drink. I will be doing this at 11:00 am Sunday. I will have watched my daughter’s “sermon from the couch” and if you wish to remember the Lord’s taking action to save us...we can at least do it at the same time. My point is this: it is

not about me, and it is not about “ministerial power.” Jesus did what HE did, and gave the sacrament to us that “we might remember HIM until HE comes.” God is good, all the time. All the time, God is good. Including this time!

The Scripture reading I have chosen for today is from 1 Kings 19:13b (which begins with the words, “Then a voice said unto him”) to 21, which is the end of the chapter. Elijah is the last of the prophets of God. In the passage Elisha receives the call of God to be the prophet who will succeed Elijah. It is about ministry. It is purely about faithful ministry. You know I always have a story to tell. This one is personal. I heard the Voice. I was in my late teens. I had not been careful about attending worship. And I frankly believed that the important thing in life was to be a good person...though I would have been hard pressed to tell anyone what I meant by that. I knew to the tips of my toes when I heard the Voice, that I was utterly guilty, utterly unworthy, and that I would have to obey (there was no room for decision...it just had to be done). I was smart enough to know I did not know what ministry was about or meant. So I deliberately began attending worship to find out. I made an appointment with the minister who was serving the Presbyterian Church I chose to attend. I told him I had heard the Voice. He was not impressed. He questioned my mental stability.

I went home and got my Bible and found a quiet place to read. I read Exodus 3:4. It is in the midst of the history of Moses and the burning bush. “When the Lord saw that

(Moses) had gone over to look (at the bush that was burning and yet not consumed), God called to him from within the bush, “Moses, Moses!” I learned 2 lessons that day, maybe 3! The Voice was real. That is the biggie. (2) I would need to trust the Biblical Word above all else in the faith journey before me. (3) That there would be many moments in life when I would have to humble myself in the sight of the Lord because I can be “unconsciously and amusingly simple.” The beautiful blond haired and blue-eyed girl I met at that church (where by the way we continued to worship) would say...often... “You are so bright, but you can be so dumb!” When she says it, it never feels like a “put down.” It’s a compliment. I can bump my head on the same cupboard door twice within minutes of each other. Unconsciously and amusingly simple. The Voice is real and forever. I am being reminded of that.

Here is an interesting thing. The NIV translates the original as, “Then a voice said to him.” The King James Version says, “And behold, there came a voice unto him.” I translate that Elizabethan lingo to mean, “And guess what, there came a voice unto him, that others did not hear.” I have been a witness to that reality. My favourite American preacher would use the phrase “being tapped on the shoulder.” I stick with Voice because Moses heard it, and so did Elijah, and of course...this is even more important... so did Jesus.

One of the dynamics in the passage in 1 Kings 19 is that Elijah is bemoaning the fact that he is all alone. He is the last prophet. All the others have been killed off for what they

were saying in the name of the Lord God. And on this fact he is not naïve. They are looking for Elijah and if they find him alone, he will die. What then? And of course the answer is, God is. God calls whom HE will to bear HIS word in the midst of HIS world. Elisha is the answer to the question “what then?” As a matter of fact God tells Elijah he does not understand everything. There are 7,000 in Israel, who have not bowed down to Baal, and whose mouths have not kissed him. Elijah, like someone you know, was unconsciously and amusingly simple. So bright, so faithful and yet so...dumb!

At the right time, in God’s chosen moment, Elijah’s eyes, his ears, his mind are opened to the truth. His situation is very different from what he had assumed it to be. Some of you may remember when my daughter got all excited when I said, “We are in Babylon” way back on Mother’s Day. We had been talking about the fact that we missed corporate worship. Coffee and goodies with our people, handshakes and hugs. The truth is we are not in exile. We are in Christ in a trying time, a hard time. And we are not alone. Which is why the memory of the Voice is so precious to me. Whenever my faith is being tested by the circumstances in which I find myself, I go back to the beginning. And for me that is the season in which “there came a voice unto me.” Unexpected, uninvited, in fact something I did not believe possible. Such are moments of revelation. We are in the midst of one such moment. For the first time in my life I have heard the Premier of Ontario pronounce an unapologetic blessing on the population of the province. I have seen a Prime Minister of Canada remain

ominously silent to choose words about our house, rather than casting stones at glass houses belonging to someone else. I am moved by the wisdom of our leaders. I know they are not perfect, and I know the moment is a fragile one. But I have seen things I did not expect to see and heard things I did not expect to hear. And in the midst of it all I am reminded how I got to this point, with so many moments when my own life seemed to hang by a thread.

So on a Sunday when the Church ought to be meeting in Assembly but is not doing so, I will rejoice that God's Spirit is still being poured out in the midst of HIS people and upon them. On a Sunday upon which you cannot be led by me in person in a communion service, I urge you to join me with bread and wine or a substitute remembering that Jesus saves and that HIS grace is sufficient even for the saving of us in this season of plague. I will pray for you even as I ask that you would pray for me and mine. We have been fortunate, but it has been months since we could hold Rebekah and Matthew in our arms...and we are really missing them. It has been months since we have been able to hold you close to our own hearts, and we miss the experience. We have been so blessed by God in you!!

The Voice still speaks and we are witnesses. The Church is still ministered unto and ministers to the body of the faithful not only here in Stirling, or Ontario, or Canada, but around the world. I have often said, the well being of the church financially is dependent on that simple act of passing

the offering plate on Sunday mornings. How wrong you have proved me to be. Your financial commitment to the Church and its mission, to Jesus and HIS ministry has blown the doors off my expectations....I am unconsciously and amusingly simple in so many ways. You are strong because God is with you where you are, in pain, in joy, in hope, most of all in faith. May you taste the full blessings the Lord has intended for you, while we are separated from each other.

Let us pray;

“Speak Lord in the stillness.” Minister to us. We need thee. O we need thee! Help us that we might bleed for others who suffer what we do not suffer. Be with those who have lost loved ones at the hands of those who ought to have protected them. Be with those who are protesting that they might be heard and values might change. Most of all touch us that our eyes might be opened to the woundedness of our fellow citizens and especially those whose skin tones are different from our own, whose eyes are shaped different from our own, whose accents are different from our own. Remind me and remind us together that we are all of us children of the God who redeems. Fill us with the love of Jesus for others. We have witnessed amazing grace. Amen