**Rev. Melissa J. Claxton
1 Kings 19:9-13a, Luke 5:15-16
Dead Man Walking ~ Elijah found strength in God**

We’re continuing our series on *Dead Man Walking: How a Burned-Out Prophet Came Back to Life.* In this series, we’re looking at Elijah and how he was able to go from being burned out to being renewed and ready to serve.

Quick review – The first thing he did was to step away from what was causing the burnout in the first place. Sometimes, we can’t totally step away from the chaos, but we need to be intentional in making time to step away from the things that are causing us stress. It’s part of self-care...step away.

The second thing that Elijah did was to take care of his body, to care for his basic needs. I don’t know if you are familiar with *Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs,* but the very basic of human needs is physiological. These are the biological requirements for human survival such as food, water, clothing, sleep. Nothing else can be addressed if our basic needs aren’t met first. That’s why the angel didn’t jump right to “Get your act together. Get your strength from God and get back to work.” The angel knew that before could move to trusting in God, his basic needs needed to be met first.

So, step away from whatever’s causing the stress...take care of your basic human needs...then, we come to a point in the journey where we can get strength from God. Let us pray.

**Sermon:** In 2011, the United Methodist Church put out this video where they interviewed Pauley Perrette. Perrette is an actress who played Abby Sciuto in NCIS. That’s her most famous role. I love the interview and it’s easily found on-line. I can even send you the link if you’d like to see it.

What I love about this interview is how Perrette talks about her faith journey. She explains that her faith was always strong, her spirituality was always strong, but she went through this really dark time in her life, to the point where she forgot how to pray. She got to this point where she didn’t know what to say to God. I understand, because I’ve been there. There’s too much going on...what do I focus on? What do I pray for? So she just started praying “Lord, thank you for everything and forgive me for everything.” After praying this for a while, she began to realize just how powerful that simple prayer was. “Lord, thank you for everything!” The good and the bad. “Lord, forgive me for everything.”

In the interview, she also talked about going back to church and how she wanted to go to the church her real estate agent went to because he was happiest guy she ever met. She ended up at Hollywood United Methodist church, a place where she felt that she could be loved and excepted, without judgment or condemnation. It was a place where she could really grow in her faith and her spirituality.

I know I’ve shared about her interview before, but I bring it up again because there were similarities in what she was going through and what Elijah was going through. I realize that she wasn’t being hunted down by Queen Jezebel, but she was at this place where she was in crisis and needed to reconnect with in a new and real way.

That’s where Elijah was. I don’t believe that Elijah ever lost his faith in God. I don’t believe he questioned if God was real. I also don’t believe that it’s a bad thing if we find ourselves in that place from time to time. I don’t believe that it’s bad to be in a place where we are questioning. Confucius says, “Doubt is the beginning of wisdom.” It’s alright to doubt, because doubt can lead us to a place where we can grow.

Elijah had separated himself from the chaos. Elijah had spent some time taking care of his body, his basic human needs. **Then, Elijah took the next step, and that was to reconnect with God.**  Our passage last week ended with him getting up and traveling for 40 days to Horeb, better known as Mt. Sinai. That’s the same place where Moses had first connected with God. It was the place where the Israelites gathered after they had been released from captivity as slaves in Egypt. This was the place in which God gave the Israelites the 10 Commandments. It was Holy Place. It was also a quiet place. ***Elijah went to a quiet place, a cave on the side of the mountain.***

**Are you finding that quiet space in your life?** We live in a really noisy world. We live in a really chaotic world. And to really connect with God, we need to find a quiet space. I have several. One is our treehouse...in the middle of the woods where there is no electricity, no television, no internet...it’s a quiet space where I can get away from the chaos. I have those spaces and all of them are a little bit different. Worship is one of those spaces.

***I have discovered that you need several quiet spaces in your world where you can step away and connect with God***...Jesus did. Jesus was always stepping away in search of a quiet space where he could connect with God. Our passage today in Luke 5 says that. This was early in his ministry and he was already intentional about finding those quiet spaces where he could step away and connect with God.

In my breakfast nook, I have a picture with Psalm 46:10 on it. It reads, *“Be still and know that I am God.”* Finding those quiet spaces in life is simply about being still in the presence of God, but it does need to be intentional. I’m going to be honest. I don’t do it enough. That’s one of my personal goals for this year...to be intentional in finding those quiet spaces where I can connect with God. **Where are you finding that quiet space in your life and are you being intentional about it?**

After Elijah finds that quiet space and sits in the presence of God, a space is created where he can hear God speak. I believe that can be true for us as well. Elijah hears the voice of God call out to him saying, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” Personally, when I read that, I hear compassion in those words. “*What are you doing here?”*

**Elijah responds by pouring his heart out to God.** He prays. Prayer, in its simplest terms, is a conversation with God, and Elijah was engaging in this conversation with God. It wasn’t a nice, sweet, safe conversation. Instead, ***Elijah’s prayer was raw and honest. It came for the very core of his being.*** It reminds me of Perrette’s prayer. Elijah was struggling, and it all came rolling out. ***I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.”* What do you mean, what am I doing here?**

I think that’s the beauty of honest prayer. God already knows, but God still wants us to express how we feel, to pour our hearts out to him. And when we find ourselves in a place where we don’t know what to say, I think that’s the perfect thing to say. “***God, I don’t know what to say. I don’t know what to feel. I don’t know what to do, but I stand here in your presence and I just give it all to you.”*** Or maybe you do know how you’re feeling.

Elijah’s prayer reminds me of a prayer I prayed years ago. One of my sisters and I had babies three months apart. Her son Christopher was three months older than my Jennifer. He died when he was 13 months old. I never lost my faith. I never stepped away from the church, but one evening, I was watching something that took me right back to that moment and I realized something. I was pissed off. (I was told pastors can’t say that, but I believe if you really mean it, you can.) I was angry, and I was angry at God. I was angry that Christopher had died. I was angry that it was a senseless, stupid accident. I was angry that God hadn’t stepped in and prevented it. Oh, I was angry, and in that moment, I let God have it. I paced back and forth in my living room yelling at God.

In that moment, I prayed the most honest prayer I had ever prayed in my life, and you know what? It was OK. God wasn’t mad at me for that. God wasn’t angry because I had all this pent out emotion that was spilling all over the place. Instead, God was right there ready to hear it all. In that moment, I learned that it was okay to share my deepest frustrations and even my anger with God. **I learned that the best prayer is the one that comes from the heart, and that’s where God meets you.**

This is what Elijah did. Elijah prayed a deep, heartfelt prayer. He openly acknowledge that he had come to the end of his rope, that he was weak and tired and didn’t possess the willpower to go on. He traveled to a quiet place and prayed an honest prayer, and in that space, ***Elijah was open to feeling the presence of God.***

 I love Elijah’s mountain top experience. After spilling his guts to God, God told him to go and stand on the mountain because God was going to pass by. As Elijah was standing there, a powerful wind tore the mountain apart. Yet, God was not in the wind. Then, there was an earthquake, but God was not in the earthquake. Then there was a fire, but God was not in the fire. Finally, there was a gentle whisper. God was in the whisper.

Other translations say that it was sheer silence. I like that better. God’s not in the chaos. (God created order out of chaos...but God’s not in the chaos.) God’s not in the noise we tend to surround ourselves with. In order for us to truly hear the voice of God, we need to step away from all of that and find a quiet space like Elijah did...like Jesus did. That’s where we are open to connecting to God.

In front of that cave, Elijah found the grace and strength he needed to carry on. **Elijah got strength from God, because Elijah was intentional about making space for God in his life.** This wasn’t just for Elijah. We can encounter God and hear the voice of God in our lives as well. When we find ourselves in a place of struggle or burnout, we can get strength from God to carry on, but it requires us to be intentional about creating that space for that to happen. It requires us to find a quiet space in our life. It requires our willingness to pour our hearts out to God.

**Where are you finding that quiet space in your life?** Are you being intentional about finding that quiet space in your life? Scripture is full of spiritual disciplines that can help us do this...including meditation (finding a quiet space to listen), prayer, reading and reflecting on scripture, worship or small group studies. These are just some of the ways. Maybe a meditative walk...listening to music...serving in a soup kitchen. **Where are you finding that quiet space in your life?**

Elijah’s journey from burned out to renewed included spiritual renewal where he made time to connect with God. He knew he couldn’t do it on his own. He knew that he need to draw strength from someone bigger than himself. He knew he needed the presence of God. So, he went to a quiet place and prayed an honest prayer.

I want to end by sharing with you a story by a man named Robert Veninga. This is what he wrote about his journey. “I left work early after hearing that I would lose my job. I got in my car and went to my church. Unfortunately, the minister was not there, but the chapel was open. I went in and stared at the cross. I started to cry. I told God that I didn’t have the strength to get through this mess, and I asked for help. I must have sat there for a couple of hours. I brushed away the tears. Suddenly a whole load went off my shoulders. I can’t explain it but I went into the chapel crushed, and I came out feeling strong. I actually felt that I could make it. (*A Gift of Hope [New York: Ballantine Books, 1985], 214.)* Let us pray.