*DEVOTIONS*

August 7 - 12

*People of God: Elijah*

**Monday, August 7 1 Kings 17:1-24**

*“You are a man of God, and the Lord speaks through you”*

 The prophet Elijah appears on the scene abruptly. Apart from his name, he is identified only as being from Tishbe. He addresses his prophecy to Ahab, king of Israel, who has married Jezebel, a devotee of the Canaanite god Baal, and has built an altar and a temple for Baal, thus provoking the anger of “the Lord, the God of Israel.” In Canaanite religion, Baal the storm god is the one who brings rain and, thus, the possibility of life on earth. Elijah’s prophecy emphasizes that it is the Lord, not Baal, who makes life possible.

 The chapter goes on to tell three stories, each of which shows in practical terms the truth that Elijah has proclaimed: God is the One who gives life! First, when Elijah has to flee from the anger of Ahab, God sustains him by providing water from the brook and ordering ravens to feed him. Second, the widow and her son are fed when their flour and oil are miraculously replenished. Third, death itself is conquered as life is given to the son of the widow. These stories call us to believe that with God, all things are possible.

*You triumph over death, Lord, and give me everlasting life. Amen.*

**Tuesday, August 8 1 Kings 18:1-20**

*“Go and present yourself to King Ahab”*

 “In the third year of the drought . . .” This notice of the drought’s duration is important, for it establishes the fact that at least one full cycle of the seasons has come and gone, with no sign of rain – neither Baal nor those who worship him have been able to end the deadly dry spell. Only by the word of the Lord through his prophet will there be rain.

 On his way to speak with King Ahab, Elijah encounters Obadiah, the chief steward in Ahab’s palace, the ancient Israelite equivalent of the chief of staff in the U.S. White House. Obadiah would have had to earn Ahab’s complete trust to hold his position, and the extent of that trust is evident in the fact that it is to Obadiah that Ahab turns to deal with the national crisis at hand. Yet, Obadiah was also a devout follower of the Lord God. Thus we have a man who tries to pay allegiance to two lords at the same time. But his conversation with Elijah makes it clear that he fears Ahab, and his reluctance to obey God and make the announcement of Elijah’s presence shows the impossibility of serving two masters.

*I serve you alone, Lord, and pledge my ultimate allegiance to no one else. Amen.*

**Wednesday, August 9 1 Kings 18:21-46**

*“If the Lord is God, follow him. But if Baal is God, then follow him”*

 The passage obviously asserts the power of Israel’s God, who is omnipotent and sovereign over the world. Just as important, although conveyed more subtly, are God’s persistent grace and mercy. Despite the blatant unfaithfulness of human beings, God nevertheless responds to human needs. In the case of our passage, it is God who initiates the end of the drought and the return of rain. There are times when God acts wondrously and publicly – such as in sending fire from heaven – in order to bring people back to himself.

 At the heart of biblical faith is the demand for allegiance to only one God. For most Christians, the question is not whether we believe in the one God, but whether we remain faithful to the one God and no other; to trust that one God, even in times when other alternatives seem more practical, more immediately relevant, or more popular. Human needs and wants are so great that there is always the temptation to keep one’s theological options open to hedge against the possibility that our God may not adequately provide for us.

*You, Lord, are able to provide all my needs. There is none like you. Amen.*

*DEVOTIONS*

August 7 - 12

*People of God: Elijah*

**Thursday, August 10 1 Kings 19:1-21**

*“After the fire came a gentle whisper”*

 In chapter 18, the Lord is known in spectacular manifestations of fire from heaven and sudden rainstorm after a drought. Here, however, the point is made quite deliberately that God is not locked into any one mode of appearing. Sometimes God is not made known to us through flashy events. Sometimes God is known in unspectacular ways, through the gentle whisper. For Elijah, who had known the presence of God through God’s care and through miraculous acts that clearly demonstrated God’s power, divine will was also manifested in the quiet voice that followed the noisy storm.

 The passage shows that ministry may take many forms. Elijah’s tasks in chapter 18 was to confront a powerful leader with his sins, to call on people to be faithful to God’s demands, and to act so that others may be converted by the powerful word of God. Here in chapter 19 we learn that ministry may include the passing on of the mantle of leadership. Faithfulness to God’s calling may entail the preparation of others for their own ministries.

*I listen for your voice, Lord, be it gentle or forceful. Amen.*

**Friday, August 11 1 Kings 21:1-29**

*“You have sold yourself to what is evil in the Lord’s sight”*

 This passage paints a vivid picture of the abuse of power and the impact of social injustice. It tells of how a failed real estate transaction between a powerful king and an ordinary citizen leads to the frame-up of that citizen, a death sentence for him, and the confiscation of his property. Although the story is set in ancient Israel in the time of Ahab, it could be told with equal power and relevance in any period in human history.

 The tenth commandment warns against coveting something that belongs to another. In the intensity of his greed, Ahab commits acts of violence against Naboth in order to achieve his goals. This shows how easily sin escalates. Covetousness leads quickly to perjury and murder; disregard for the tenth commandment leads to violations of the ninth (‘do not bear false witness’) and sixth (‘do not murder’) commandments. Ahab has placed other priorities and desires before God, elevating material things to the status of gods. Thus, his covetousness has become a form of idolatry, and he has broken the first and second commandments, as well.

*You alone are God and I worship no other person or thing. Amen.*

**Saturday, August 12 2 Kings 1:1-18**

*“Is there no God in Israel?”*

 The fundamental issue that this passage treats is the violation of the first commandment, God’s initial charge to the Israelites: “You shall have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:3). Ahaziah’s problem is that he believes that Baal-zebub, rather than Israel’s God, is the lord of life. The passage makes plain, however, that life is the Lord’s to give and to take away, and that life is mediated through the proclamation of the word of the Lord.

 This is the lesson that two disciples of Jesus, James and John, had to learn (Luke 9:54-55). Angry that the Samaritans seemed to have rejected Jesus, James and John offered to bring down fire from heaven to consume the unbelievers. In other words, they wanted to do what Elijah had done. Jesus, however, rebuked them, and they simply went on. It is the Lord who takes away life and the Lord who spares life. While Elijah had been ordered by God to proclaim God’s condemnation of the followers of Baal, the disciples had not been given authority by God to condemn unbelievers. Neither have you or I.

*You alone are the righteous Judge, Lord, and you alone give life. Amen.*