

What Are You Doing Here? — 1 Kings 19:1-15
Saint Marks UMC, Charleston, WV –

16 June 2013 – 4th Sunday after Pentecost

¹Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. ²Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, “So may the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life like the life of one of them by this time tomorrow.” ³Then he was afraid; he got up and fled for his life, and came to Beer-sheba, which belongs to Judah; he left his servant there.

⁴But he himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a solitary broom tree. He asked that he might die: “It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life, for I am no better than my ancestors.” ⁵Then he lay down under the broom tree and fell asleep. Suddenly an angel touched him and said to him, “Get up and eat.” ⁶He looked, and there at his head was a cake baked on hot stones, and a jar of water. He ate and drank, and lay down again. ⁷The angel of the LORD came a second time, touched him, and said, “Get up and eat, otherwise the journey will be too much for you.” ⁸He got up, and ate and drank; then he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God. ⁹At that place he came to a cave, and spent the night there.

Then the word of the LORD came to him, saying, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” ¹⁰He answered, “I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away.”

¹¹He said, “Go out and stand on the mountain before the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by.” Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake; ¹²and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. ¹³When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then

there came a voice to him that said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" ¹⁴He answered, "I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away." ¹⁵Then the LORD said to him, "Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus; when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael as king over Aram. ¹⁶Also you shall anoint Jehu son of Nimshi as king over Israel; and you shall anoint Elisha son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah as prophet in your place. ¹⁷Whoever escapes from the sword of Hazael, Jehu shall kill; and whoever escapes from the sword of Jehu, Elisha shall kill. ¹⁸Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him."

¹⁹So he set out from there, and found Elisha son of Shaphat, who was plowing. There were twelve yoke of oxen ahead of him, and he was with the twelfth. Elijah passed by him and threw his mantle over him. ^{21b}Then he set out and followed Elijah, and became his servant.

“WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?” God asks Elijah twice. Once, when Elijah was in the midst of a spell of clinical depression. (Verses 4-9 are a good clinical description of what that is like) And the second time came after God had shown Elijah an earthquake, wind storm, and fire – the typical BIG SPIELBERG DISPLAYS that Elijah was used to (like the Lord, God, the Bull! Experience with the prophets of Ba'al on the mountain – and in which God played peek-a-boo with Elijah, just to get Elijah to understand that God really could be heard, along with Paul Simon's harmonies, in the Sound of Silence.

Mother Teresa observed that “God is rarely found in the midst of noise and restlessness; instead He is the Friend of silence.”

Your preacher must confess that there are times in my life when things happen -- when I really, REALLY want a LORD GOD - THE BULL! experience to happen. And, in my head, I know that this is not what I should be praying for. But -- in my heart, sometimes my heart still wants to cry out PLEASE -- LORD GOD - THE BULL!

And when that happens, I have to stop doing what I am doing, and I have to focus on God -- just God -- not LORD GOD - THE BULL! rescuer. I need to remember God’s Holiness and God’s Perfect Will and God's Love.

One of the most helpful things is for me to remember just how much God has done for me in the past -- and to give thanks. I need to read God’s Word. And then I need to dwell in the sheer sound of silence -- not asking for anything; just dwelling with God quietly in my heart.

“WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?” It’s a question that God still asks us today.

It's one of the fundamental questions of life, that we probably don't ask as often as we should. I know a pastor who has that question typed in large letters on a card that is permanently affixed

to the pulpit from which he preaches -- just to remind him each time he climbs into the pulpit to preach.

“WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?” It’s a question that God still asks us today.

Even in the midst of all that swirls about us – **busy-ness** and **challenges** and **sorrow** and **frightening circumstances** and **times** when it seems like we’re not sure how we can go on – in all of these circumstances, God still asks us – as God asked Elijah:

WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?

One successful therapist has admitted that **what she mostly does with clients is (1) listen and then (2) ask, “And what are you going to do?”**

Janet Wolf is a pastor, teacher and author. She’s the one who introduced me, and hence you, to the story of Fayette, who taught us our Baptismal name is “beloved child of God, precious and beautiful to behold.”

I’ve also heard her tell the **story of when she was a child, her grandmother was the one who always listened to her stories, taking the time to hear all the details. She even listened to Janet's complaints:**

- *My sister got the good grades, but I'm the one who worked hard.*

- *Life's awful. I was the last one picked for kickball, because no one knew how good I am.*

After listening, her grandmother always asked, **"And?"**

There was only one acceptable response: **"I'M GOING ON**

ANYHOW." Janet couldn't leave the room until she gave that response.

"It was a rock-bottom faith statement," she explains, **"that no matter what, God is in the midst of this and so you can and will and must go on."**

When her grandmother was dying, Janet visited and sat by her bedside.

Her grandmother said, **"I need to hear you say this again. And you know what it is. So I'm going to ask, "And?" "**

Janet couldn't get anything out.

Again her grandmother said, **"And?"**

Janet still couldn't get anything out.

"Janet," her grandmother said, **"I know that you hear me. And I know that you know that death is coming. And I know that you will answer when I say, "And?" "**

Janet finally responded, **"I'M GOING ON ANYHOW."**

"Yes, you are, child," her grandmother said. **"And I just want you to know that God's going to be asking you that question each and every day of your life, and I'm going to**

be able to hear your answer. It better be loud, and it better be clear. Every time God says, "And?" -you say, "I'M GOING ON ANYHOW." "

Janet Wolf's grandmother, like the therapist I quoted, understood that **ACTION – NOT FEELINGS – IS THE ONE ARENA IN WHICH WE ACTUALLY HAVE SOME FREEDOM TO CHOOSE. OUR FEELINGS OFTEN REFUSE TO FOLLOW OUR HEADS, OUR LOGIC.** But we can choose to Go On Anyway – *even when we don't feel like it.* And in so doing, we can find what we were unable to discover when we just wrung our hands and moaned.

Elijah was not given a psychological "adjustment" by God to get his head screwed back on right. Elijah was confronted with the awesome power and presence of God in the sheer sound of silence ... and then Elijah was sent back to work. God said **WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?** and God wasn't in the mood to hear Elijah's sanctimonious whining and self-pity. Instead God put Elijah back to work

Senator Rockefeller's "love letter" for West Virginia has been making its way around the social media recently, on the verge of his retirement from the U.S. Senate. Its reading made me remember of the time when Jay lost the election for governor &

came to WVWC where he served four years as its President. In that experience, he learned a lot about leadership and about goodness and about faith and about community, all of which later made him a better governor and then U.S. Senator. And, now – just as back then in the angst of that bitter defeat -- now, he and Sharon have wrestled with the issues of both of their health. And once again, he has come to understand in the midst of circumstances largely beyond their control about “going on anyhow” – even if it means going on to a different place, or in a different way -- because God keeps asking the question **WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?**

It's not that God doesn't care about our troubles. Indeed God does care – more than we can know. God certainly took care of Elijah.

But when we think that it's all about us (e.g., with Elijah: “I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, ...”) then we have made ourselves the center of the universe. **It's not about us.** It's about God. . **And, oh by the way, Elijah (God reminds him) you are not alone. At my last count there are 7,000 who have not**

wroshipped Ba'al, and they're waiting on you to come be their leader. Get to it!

There are times in life when we really need to take time apart, to be nourished, to rest, to listen for the Still Small Voice of God, which will ask you: **WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?**

If you listen well, and if you remember, you can answer **"I'M GOING ON ANYHOW."** And in so doing, God will be with you, empowering you to do not only what you need to do to get through it, but also to be a blessing to others.

- **WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?**
- **"I'M GOING ON ANYHOW."**
- **WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?**
- **"I'M GOING ON ANYHOW."**

Here is the prophet Elijah, going through the greatest crisis of his life, and he doesn't know how to handle it. Although he starts out with a typical human response: running. Then he goes through a spate of "Woe is me" depression. Then, finally, after being nurtured by an angel or something, he makes it to the "mountain of God," where he has this remarkable encounter with God.

That encounter comes in the sheer, still sound of silence. And when he confronts that question now, "What are you doing here?" he realizes that he must not only GO ON ANYWAY, but, God has planned for him to go forward, on a greater mission than he's ever had before.

And so, in the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, I ask you: **WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?** AMEN