

Elijah's Story – Meditation

When two weeks ago Kat spoke here about wilderness experiences I rediscovered my old love for Elijah, the prophet.

I'm going to lead you through a meditation again, just as I did some weeks ago.

It's Sunday evening and a time for you just to rest.

So that's what I want you to do.

I want you to feel comfortable and relaxed. Try to be still, open, curious and at peace.

If you want to, close your eyes and use your imagination to enter into the scene of our story...and all you have to do is listen and rest.

Imagine yourself meeting Elijah, the prophet.

Hear him speak to you...

Things had been going incredibly well for me. I had won an enormous victory over the opposition. All had ganged up against me, all these political and religious leaders who represented all that was false. Their worshipping the wrong gods stood for the concentration of power in the hands of a few wealthy and greedy, while the peasants who did the real work, had no voice, no vote, no land.

Their religion sanctified cruelty and injustice. I was called to put all my energy in stopping this. And I won. I killed all their prophets. All of them against me alone, and I won.

What a triumph! What a victory! What a confirmation that I had been right all the time, when I seemed to be so entirely alone.

And then I heard that one woman had set her heart on destroying me. One woman against me, who had beaten all those men. But it knocked all the energy and confidence out of me. I was limp and helpless. I had to flee for my life. I ran from the city, from the meeting places, and the cultivated land.

I came to the edge of the desert. And I went on, another twenty miles or more.

In the sun-baked desert, I found a little bush; if I sat under it, there was enough shade to protect me.

This was the end, I thought. My success had faded away.

I was a failure, like everyone before me. They had not been able to stand up against all that was wrong on the world, and I had done no better. So, I made a prayer: “It is enough, Lord; take my life, for I am no better than my ancestors before me.”

The prayer settled me.

I was able to sleep.

The next thing I knew was this angel waking me up and telling me to get up for breakfast.

Breakfast?

Where was that going to come from – in the desert?

But, sure enough, somehow there was some sort of bread, and a jar of water, all ready for me. So, I nibbled at the bread and took a few sips of the water. There was nothing else to do, so I went back to sleep.

Not for long. The angel was back again.

“You’ve got to have a good breakfast, if you are going to do a good day’s work...” – but I was not planning on any work – all I wanted to do was die.

However, the angel made it clear that I was not going to have a nice quiet death. I was to be on the road again. And it was a long road. I was on that road forty days and forty nights. I landed up at Mount Horeb, God’s home in the desert.

I found a cave in the hillside. I was able to crawl into it and curl up.

I felt safe and sheltered, curled up on myself. I felt secure and happy with my messed-up sick self.

I was alone with the wounds which were the only possessions left to me. This would be a nice way to die.

But suddenly there was a question at my ear: “What are you doing here?”

Was it God?

It was a sensible, enquiring question, which needed a straightforward answer. So, I told my story:

“I am here because I have been so keen to stand up for the true God. All your people have abandoned you, they have ruined your places of worship, they have killed all your ministers, I am the only one left, and they are chasing me, to kill me too.”

There was only one thing still true about me, that I was alone and hated; all my securities and successes had failed. There was no ground under my feet. The only thing left was my death wish. The voice came back: “Get out of that hole, and stand up straight on the mountain, and face God.”

I knew that God was very close. And it was chaos. It was terrifying.

There was a powerful wind that broke up the landscape. But I realised that God was not in the wind. It happened but God was outside it.

And then there was an earthquake. It happened, but God was outside it.

And then there was fire. But I realised that God was not in the fire. It happened, but God was outside it.

After all this there was nothing left but a gentle murmuring sound.

And that was God.

So, I did uncurl myself and I went out and stood straight up at the cave's entrance. I picked up my cloak and wrapped it round my face: the dust had not settled – I was almost choking.

And the same patient question came again: "What are you doing here?"

The wind and earthquake and fire had not changed the question. So, they did not change my answer: "I am here because I have been so keen to stand up for the true God. All your people have abandoned you, they have ruined your places of worship, they have killed all your ministers, I am the only one left, and they are chasing me, to kill me too."

But this time there was something more. There was a job for me to do. I was told to go back into politics and take responsibility for a change of government. There were specific people who had to be found and put into positions of leadership. There was a plan. And a future. I was no longer alone.

What made all the difference to me was the persistent quiet questioner. The questions and the questioner were there after the events of chaos just as before. In a sense, nothing had changed. But my all-embracing depression was lifted: my damaged nature was no longer the main thing that was true about me. I could get on with the job of standing up for a truth and a purpose outside myself.

The chaos was not the end of everything, but the beginning of a new stage of work.

So, I went and found a friend and did the job.

And the message of all this?

God, the sender of angels and friends, wants us, calls us, feeds us, meets us gently, and has a job to do for us.

So, go from this place strengthened and blessed by the eternal presence we have felt here, and be glad and loving to all we meet, for we have been with God, who has smiled on us with divine favour, and teaches us to smile on the world with a similar favour. Amen.