

Inheritance and choice – the long journey

1 Kings 19:1-15; Luke 8:26-30

Rev J Shannon

Go back to where you came from. Remember the journey of your ancestors. This passage takes great pains to link Elijah's story with Moses. The desert, the journey, the 40 days. It is important that he/we pin his tribulations to the trials of those who went before him.

Elijah was a prophet somewhere in the 9th century before Christ. Most people remember him only for the story of handing his cloak to Elisha and ascending into heaven. There is more story than that, in fact there are at least 4 stories of Elijah. Not the least is that he was a fire and brimstone kind of guy. Elisha, who followed in his wake was known as a restorer. A much more gentle ministry.

Elijah raged against what was happening in the world. He saw his people turning to Baal. He saw corruption and detachment, disinterest and self interest taking over. If we replace Baal with power, we might as well be describing the world we live in now. He raged and brought drought and prophesied doom.

But in this story, he felt defeated. Did he apologise to God? No, he said he felt he let his ancestors down. He lay down to die. But God had other plans.

The story has 2 main elements, the journey (where he was and where he came from) and where God was.

Geoff and I have been on a bit of a journey. It was not the trip we wanted to take but it was the one we must. As lock-downs fade, I've seen each of this congregation reach out to their families. We had to, as well – only ours are further away. Geoff went west to see his brothers and sister. I went to a conference in Santa Fe and then East to my brothers and sisters. We are both the youngest in our families. Since we lost Geoff's little sister. You know that 3 years can make an enormous difference to a grandchild – they go from child to teen or teen to adult – but we don't pay attention to the dramatic changes that take place at the other end of life – and they are real.

Unlike other reunions, this one had an air of finality. Each has despaired at the state of the world and each has crawled under the broom brush with Elijah and are ready to die. My friend in Maine is on palliative therapy and we will not be going on any more adventures. The two years COVID robbed from us was two years of vibrant health and energy, now spent. The 3 oldest siblings are now

too old to travel but I left with the hope my nearest brother and my young nephew might finally make the trip.

This trip, like Elijah, makes us think about our ancestors and with the world in such a state, can we know whether we have succeeded or failed them. One thing we know is that we are the product of our ancestors and that means something. The Australian indigenous leader Rev'd Glenn Laughrey said that reconciliation can never take place until we know our own ancestors and bring their wounds to the table to talk with another who knows their ancestors and brings their wounds to the table, We are all a product of our histories. We need to understand what is it in my culture that makes me think and say these things...so I can understand where another is coming from.

I had the privilege of being led on retreat by a Lakota Elder. The Lakota are an American First Nations people from the pueblos of New Mexico. Ancestors are very important to them and like the Māori, they keep them close. They feel guided and guarded by those who went before them. It is very real. As I can sometimes hear my grandfather's voice – particularly on issues of wisdom. I can hear because I remember him though he died in 1966. Pat (our leader) might hear her Great grandmother's voice.

I liked the way the past and the present dwelled together in her world. She is described as a medicine woman because she wants to heal the world. Unlike Elijah, she is not raging and threatening but instead building bridges to heal ancestral wounds; racial divides and promote an indigenous respect for conservation. First nations people all over the world had a loving relationship with the earth – something settlers everywhere seemed to have lost.

So for all his ranting and raging, Elijah lost the battle and crawled under his Broom bush hoping to die...but God had other plans.

God sends him on another journey to the cave. God said he would come. It is in our nature to look for God everywhere. As a spiritual director, one asks "where was God in that?" and the director tries to imagine the loving spirit somewhere in their trauma. Now, I am not sure that is the right question. Perhaps we should ask them to 'go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord'. That's what the Lakota would do.

Then a great wind came and shattered the rocks – but the Lord was not in the wind. Then an earthquake shook the universe – but God was not in the earthquake – then came fire, 'but the Lord was not in the fire'. In our case, it

was drought, fire and COVID – but the Lord was not *in* those things. After the fire Elijah heard a gentle whisper.

And the Lord said, what are you doing here?

Elijah is told to pull his socks up, return to his march across the desert (in other words continue the hard journey) and when he arrives, keep doing what he is doing and undermine the dominant paradigm (Aram's corrupt rule). Shoulder to the stone – there's no getting out of it, creating God's kingdom is hard work.

Pat McCabe (our medicine woman) speaks to captains of industry, millionaires and billionaires, about the Lakota view on commerce and conservation. They know that whatever is happening is not working and they are looking for wisdom. She feels they are beginning to see some sense.

The moral to the story for me is, yes, it can sometimes be a hard road to follow but we trod forward knowing our ancestors also faced fire and quake and famine and pestilence and yet – WE, you and me, are still here. So they did something right....but it pays us to understand our own roots.

Oh, and stop looking for God **IN** things – listen to the edges, you'll find the Great Spirit there.

Holy Spirit, quiet amongst life's roar, rest with me and kick me in the rear when I falter. Amen.