

What Are You Doing Here?  
1 Kings 19:9-18  
by Rhonda Blevins, Tellico Village Community Church

Oh my. When God asks a question, watch out! To Elijah, God asks a question not once, but twice. “What are you doing here, Elijah?” Watch out, Elijah. God isn’t done with you yet.

So the story goes something like this. Our hero, Elijah, is running for his life from the villainous Queen Jezebel. You may remember what happened on Mt. Carmel. Jezebel led the Israelites in the way of Baal worship. She killed off many of the Lord’s prophets, so Elijah confronted her husband, King Ahab, and told him to assemble all the prophets of Baal together for a dual to the end, so to speak, so that the people of Israel would choose once and for all who they would worship. So King Ahab assembled 450 prophets of Baal together on Mt. Carmel. On two separate altars, two bulls would be placed. They would call on their respective gods to set fire to the altar. Whichever God responded, that would be the God Israel would worship. So the prophets of Baal went first. They danced. They prayed. They shouted, “Answer us!” Nothing. Morning came and went. Nothing. Through the midday. Nothing. Then evening fell. Nothing. Then it was Elijah’s turn—the lone prophet of Yahweh. The bull was placed upon the altar in much the same way. But he added a little twist. He poured twelve large jars of water over the sacrifice, just for a little drama. He prayed. The fire of the Lord fell. The people rejected Baal and offered their worship to Yahweh. Then Elijah had the 450 prophets of Baal slaughtered—just for good measure. Well, Jezebel didn’t take too kindly to her prophets being killed, so she sent a text message to Elijah saying she would have his head on a platter. She was just the kind of woman to keep her promise. So Elijah ran for his life. 40 days and 40 nights, until he found a cave at Mt. Horeb. Scared, tired, alone, he spent the night in that cave, and that’s we find him in today’s lection.

Hiding out in a cave.

Do you ever feel like Elijah? Do you ever feel like hiding out in a cave? Every now and then, doesn’t it feel like Jezebel’s minions are after you, trying to kill you, and you simply want to find a safe place, far away from your troubles, and hide out? Now, Elijah was no coward. Mt. Carmel proved that. No, he was anything but yellow. But sometimes, like for Elijah, it seems that we fight and we fight and eventually we’re all out of fight. We just want to run away and hide. And if what the poet said is true—there is a time for everything—then certainly there is a time for hiding. When threats are real. When mental and physical health are at stake. When healing is needed. There is a time for hiding and there is a time to come out of hiding. That’s when the Lord says, “What are you doing in here?” Did you notice the pity party Elijah offered as an answer? “Nobody likes me. Everybody hates me. And it’s all your fault, God.” So God showed Elijah a little something. Not in the wind. Not in the earthquake. Not in the fire. Not in any of the usual ways God showed up in theophanies. No, God came in the silence. But Elijah missed it. God asked again, “What are you doing here?” Elijah, having missed God’s self-revelation, repeated his same old whine: “Nobody likes me. Everybody hates me. And it’s all your fault.” All this finger-pointing didn’t seem to faze God. (God is used to that, you know.) Ignoring Elijah’s complaint, God simply tells him, “Hey Elijah, move along. I’ve got a job for you to do. Come out of the cave, Elijah. I’m not done with you yet.”

I get this story. I get it more than ever before this week. I’ve read this story many times. I’ve even preached it a time or two. But this week, I felt like Elijah, wanting nothing more than to hide out in a cave, far, far away from everyone and everything. It was just one of those terrible, horrible, no-good, very-bad weeks. Has anyone ever had a week like that? A week where nothing seemed to go right? My cat got sick—had to take her to the vet. A bill came due that I wasn’t expecting. I burned myself getting something out of the oven (I know! I was surprised to learn I had one too!) And to top it all off, someone hurt my feelings. (Awwwww.) By Thursday, I was ready to crawl off into a cave with a good book, a cup of coffee, and have myself a humdinger of a pity-party. And I did for about a day. But then God reminded me, “Hey Blevins. Move along. I’ve got a job for you to do.” You see, my name was right there

on the preaching lineup. All I wanted to do was feel sorry for myself, but God had a word for the people. “Come out of the cave, Rhonda. I’m not done with you yet.” Well, here I am. I guess God isn’t done with me yet.

And God isn’t done with *us* yet.

You know this story about Elijah is so remarkable because it seems that he goes from the highest of the high to the lowest of the low. From brazen, victorious, and strong on Mt. Carmel in one scene to fearful, defeated, and weak on Mt. Horeb. There’s quite a striking resemblance to our church right now. Back in December, we opened the doors to this beautiful new sanctuary. The result of tremendous sacrifice of time, talent, and treasure of so many of you. When I think about all that went into this incredible accomplishment, I am simply dumbfounded. You did an absolutely amazing thing. God will be honored here for untold decades. Future generations of Christians will marvel at what you’ve done together. What an incredible feat! But I wonder if the elation of December has given way to the doldrums of August. The victory on Mt. Carmel has left us weary and tired. It’s tempting to feel as if our work is now done. But God have mercy on us if we built this beautiful sanctuary just so that we’d have a bigger cave to hide in! Can you hear God now? “Hey church! Move along. I’ve got a job for you to do!” You remember me saying, “There’s a time for hiding and a time to come out of hiding?” “Come out of the cave, Community Church! I’m not done with you yet.”

God’s not done with me. God’s not done with us. And God’s not done with *you*.

I’ve got a friend who serves as a pastor in metro Atlanta—kind of a rough part of town the way he describes it. A while back, this homeless man stood outside when church would let out on Sunday mornings, asking for money. Well, some folks gave him some money, so guess what happened the next week. He was back, asking for more money. This went on for a while, and some folks from the church befriended him. They learned his name was Mike. They invited Mike to church—they made him feel welcomed. They showed him love and friendship. Eventually, Mike was baptized and became a member of that church. My pastor friend was so proud of his people for being the presence of Christ in Mike’s life. Not too long after Mike’s baptism, my friend was at home with his family in the church parsonage, when there came a knock at the door. It was Mike. What do you think was my friend’s assumption? He thought Mike was there for a handout. That wasn’t the case at all. Instead, Mike handed my friend a plastic bag filled with coins. Mike was offering his tithe to the church—10% of what he had collected on the street that week. My friend’s first instinct was to decline the gift, knowing that Mike needed those coins more than the church needed them. He quickly thought better and accepted the gift, knowing that it was important to demonstrate the worth—the inherent value—of Mike’s gift. You see, Mike had something important to offer. If Mike, one of the “least of these” has something important to offer, what does that mean for you and for me? There’s not a single person here who doesn’t have some kind thing to do, some healing word to say, some good gift to give. But we’re kind of like the people in that show, “Hoarders.” We keep our deeds, our compliments, and our gifts stored away in our caves, as if they’ll do us any good in there. “Come out of the cave, my child! I’m not done with you yet.”

Back to our scripture lesson. Elijah was obedient to the Lord’s prompting. He found the young Elisha and invested him with the prophetic office. He spent the rest of his earthly life, some 7 or 8 years, mentoring him and quite literally walking with him in the journey. Those 7 or 8 years paid off. Elisha served the Lord as a prophet to Israel for roughly 60 years, long after Elijah’s whirlwind trip to heaven. Job well done, Elijah. Time well spent. Much better than hanging out with a bunch of bats.

When God asks a question, watch out! When God asked Elijah “What are you doing here?”, it quickly led to “Come out of the cave. I’m not done with you yet!” So I close with a time of silence, following all the noise. In this moment of silent reflection, I invite that same question to resonate within you. “What are you doing here?”