

This message was prepared by Rev. Pamela Graf Short for the people of prayer of the Tontogany Presbyterian Church for the second Sunday after Pentecost, June twenty-third, in the year of our LORD two thousand and nineteen. It is based on the story of Elijah. As background, you may want to read I Kings 17-19. Here is just a portion of that story:

1 Kings 19:1-4, (5-7), 8-15a

19:1 Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword.

19:2 Then 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."

19:3 Then 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.

19:4 But 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."

19:5 Then he lay down under the broom tree and fell asleep. Suddenly an angel touched him and said to him, "Get up and eat."

19:6 He 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.

19:7 The 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."

19:8 He 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.

19:9 At 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?"

19:10 He 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."

19:11 He 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;

19:12 and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence.

19:13 When 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?"

19:14 He 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."

19:15a Then the LORD said to him, "Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus.

Our Bible story for today holds the question of the hour. What are you doing here, Elijah?
What are you doing here, Tontogany?

Is it a question of place or of purpose?
Of sharp indictment or of tender reflection?
Does the question stir in you the past? "What brought you here?"
Or does it call you to examine the present? "What keeps you here?"
Do you hear the emphasis on
"What are you doing *here*?"
Or "What are you *doing* here?"
Or "What are *you* doing here?"

What are you doing here, Elijah?
What are you doing here, Tontogany?

Elijah seems pretty conflicted. On the one hand, he is "here" because he ran away from Jezebel who threatened to kill him.

On the other hand, he asks God to take his life.

On the one hand, he is here because he is utterly exhausted and discouraged and frightened.
On the other hand he has known the victory of spiritual warfare; been fed by angels; and given super human strength first to outrun Ahab's chariot and then to go in the strength of a single meal for 40 days and nights while taking a 200 mile journey up to the top of Mt. Horeb AKA Mt. Sinai where God met Moses and wrote the 10 commandments. AKA "The Mountain of the LORD".

On the one hand he feels utterly alone.
On the other hand he is chatting it up with the Most High God, just as though he were talking to his 4th grade teacher.

What are you doing here, Elijah?
What are you doing here, Tontogany?

Most of Elijah's answer was in the past tense.
I have been doing this, that and the other thing.
All for you God.
And look.
The rest of those God-wrestlers have walked off the mat.
They are playing other games with other gods;
they're shooting up the neighborhoods and lynching the prophets.
Can't you see I'm alone.
What do you think I am going here?
I'm runnin' for my life.

This part of the conversation takes place in a cave on the side of the mountain. Makes sense, I guess if you are trying to hide. God commands Elijah to leave the cave; leave the shadows: "Go out and stand on the mountain before the LORD". Step out, Elijah. This is my mountain. Step out before me.

But Elijah does not step out.
 Maybe he was afraid of Jezebel.
 Maybe he was angry at God.
 Maybe he was just too weary to move.
 Maybe it was all three.

What are you doing here, Elijah?
 What are you doing here, Tontogany?

The next thing in the story is a little odd. A wind shows up like an arrogant atomic weapon splitting mountains and crushing rocks. The story says it shows up before the LORD. I'm very curious about this. Was the wind offering its services to God? *Hey, God! If you want to get his attention then I'll blow him right out of that cave.* But God was not in the wind. What are you doing here, wind? Move along.

Then an earthquake. *Here God. I'll shake him out for you.* But God was not in the earthquake.

Then a fire. *Let's smoke him out.*
 But God was not in the fire.

After all the hullabaloo a holy silence pierces the ears of Elijah. He takes the mantle, that is, he takes the sign of God's call to him as a prophet and he wraps it around his face. He takes a step, but only to the entrance of the cave.

And then God asks again
 What are you doing here, Elijah?
 What are you doing here, Tontogany?

Like a kid who does not quite get the point of the question, Elijah gives the exact same answer.
I have been doing this, that and the other thing.
All for you God.
And look.
The rest of those God-wrestlers have walked off the mat.
They are playing other games with other gods;
they're shooting up the neighborhoods and lynching the prophets.
Can't you see I'm alone?
What do you think I am going here?
I'm runnin' for my life.

I feel like God might have been hoping for a different answer.
 At least I was hoping Elijah would answer it differently.
 Maybe an answer of amazement that God is willing to be in conversation with humans.
 Or maybe an answer of gratitude seeing that he was, after all, still alive and well when mountains have split and the earth had quaked the fire has turned the foliage to ash.
 Or maybe an answer of worship, bowing before the God who fills all silence with holy wonder.

But Elijah doesn't answer the question any differently.

And he doesn't see beyond himself and his struggles.

And so what does God do?

God shows grace.

Okay, Elijah. I am going to show you that you are not alone.

There are some decent folk out there and I am sending you to anoint them: A new king. A new prophet.

And O, by the way there are 7,000 people who never bowed to Baal.

I am going to give you a moment just to be with God...

What are you doing here, Elijah?

What are you doing here, Tontogany?

“What are you doing *here*?”

“What are you *doing* here?”

“What are *you* doing here?”

How do you hear the question?

Now may the God of Elijah
The One who extends grace to the weary and hope to the sad
Feed you with the bread of angels
Speak to you with holy silence
And anoint you with
Power, compassion, justice and joy
Now and forevermore.
Amen