1 Kings 19:18 But I have preserved in Israel seven thousand whose knees have not bent to Baal and whose lips have not kissed him.

I have to tell you that I have always been fascinated by this history of Elijah. Here is this man, called to be a prophet of the Lord. You find his history beginning in chapter 17 of 1 Kings. No real introduction to who he is or how he was called. Just the fact that this prophet named Elijah from Tishbe appears before King Ahab and tells him there is going to be a drought for the coming years until he, Elijah gives the command for it to end.

That’s how it starts. Elijah then goes off to the wilderness and lives there, drinking water from a small stream God had shown him and eating the food that the ravens brought to him every day. Once that stream dried up, the Lord sent this man to the widow of Zarephath. She had water and by the power and wonder of God this widow, her son, and Elijah were fed because of a jar of flour and a pitcher of olive oil that never ran out.

Next we are told that the widow’s son died. Elijah is able, by the wonder of God, to bring her son back to life. How interesting to hear what the widow says when her son is given back to her alive. She says to Elijah, **“Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the Lord in your mouth is true.”** Do you see the interesting part there? She has a flour jar and an oil pitcher that won’t run out, but that is not enough for her to determine that Elijah is of God. Nope, it takes a resurrection from the dead to get her to see the hand and work of God. Kind of the same way it was in Jesus’ day. The people around him couldn’t see who and what he was even though he did countless miracles before them. The Jewish people don’t grasp the wonder of Jesus until he has risen from the dead! Even the book of Romans says, **“Who in the spirit of holiness was declared to be God’s powerful Son by his resurrection from the dead—Jesus Christ, our Lord.”** Just like the widow, we needed a resurrection to grasp the wonder and power of God. No wonder the world so adamantly and so ferociously denies the physical resurrection of Jesus.

Then after 3 years, the Lord sent Elijah to the King again. It is now that the big showdown takes place at Mt. Carmel. The 450 prophets of Baal are to build an altar and call upon Baal to burn up the offering, actually, the challenge is even simpler. Ask Baal to light the fire of this offering if he can. At the same time Elijah builds an altar too. The prophets of Baal spent the entire day praying, dancing, and even cutting themselves to get Baal to light the fire. The Scripture tells us: **“But there was no sound. No one answered. There was no response.”**

Then Elijah went to his altar, dug a trench around it and had water poured over the whole offering. Not once, not twice, but three times they poured water over the altar so that we are told the water even filled the trench. And with a simple prayer, we are told that fire fell on the sacrifice, on the wood, the stones and even the dirt. Everything inside of that trench was entirely consumed. The end result was that the 450 prophets of Baal were put to death by the people and the Lord God was praised in the land.

After this event, Elijah predicts rain. It was a heavy rain. Yet we are told that King Ahab outran the rain in his chariot as he went to Jezreel. Get this, Elijah outran the chariot to Jezreel, somewhere around a 15 mile run. What a victory for Elijah all the way around. Clearly he must have known that God was with him!

But here is the kicker. Jezebel, queen of Ahab, threatens her revenge on Elijah. He flees from her in total panic. He first flees to Beersheeba and eventually falls asleep under a broom tree. He is refreshed by an angel of the Lord with bread and water. After sleeping again, the angel comes, he eats and drinks again and then travels for the next forty days to Horeb, the mountain of God, where Elijah spends the night in a cave.

It is the next morning when the Word of the Lord came to him. It is at this point that Elijah airs out his complaint and fear for the first time. And then the Lord has Elijah go out to stand in the presence of the Lord. Do you remember? First there was a great wind that even shattered rocks, but the Lord was not in the wind. Then there was an earthquake and then a fire but the Lord was not in them. Then there was a soft, whispering voice. That was the Lord! And it is here that the words of our text pick up.

The Lord asks Elijah, **“Why are you here?”** Elijah answers this way: **“I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of Armies, but the people of Israel have abandoned your covenant. They have torn down your altars and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking to take my life.”** It will be a good thing to consider these words.

It is true that Elijah has been zealous for the Lord. It is true that the people of Israel, the Northern Kingdom of Jews, had indeed abandoned the covenant of God and did indeed follow whatever god or gods that kings and rulers over them promoted. It is Jezebel who is killing the prophets of God. It is Jezebel who is seeking his life. Elijah seems to have forgotten the great victory that the Lord had just given to him. How the people rallied to him and the Lord because of the burned up altar. And if you really want to know, Elijah was not the only one. Elijah had met Obadiah, another prophet of the Lord who had kept hidden and safe 100 of the prophets of the Lord from Jezebel. So if you just look at the facts, what do you see?

You see a prophet who is afraid and at his wits ends. You see a prophet who can’t seem to think straight or even see rightly the wonder and marvel of God. You see a believer, a believer who is just having problems, troubles and turmoil that just seems, at this moment, to overwhelm him. It is at this point that we should ask, “Why?”

My first answer will be: “Because Elijah is just like many of us.” You know, things are going good and all is bright and wonderful and we are all, “Why thank you Jesus!” But when the bottom drops out, when hardship arise and trouble comes, be it big or small, we get all shaken to the core and filled with doubts and worries and at best all we can do is utter a “What’s going on Jesus?” And at worst we think, “Where are you God!”

You realize what Elijah’s problem is? He thinks God somehow got it wrong. Jezebel threatened his life, okay, she gave command to have Elijah killed by any who saw him. And since that isn’t the way Elijah thought it should be he gets all goofy and down and afraid. Seriously, look at his words! They really are an accusation against God. “I have been doing this and that and things are hard on me and now they threaten my life. I am alone. Where have you been Lord?”

Elijah has forgotten that none of what happened was him. It was all the Lord. The Lord was behind the ravens, the flour, the oil, the fire, and the rain! But Elijah was focused on himself. Elijah was doubting the power and majesty of God though he had been the recipient and the instrument of this power of God. Elijah forgot that God was in control and knew everything and how it would be. And I wonder, what marvels and miracles did we miss because Elijah ran? Instead of trusting and leaning on his God and Lord, Elijah got all wrapped up in himself. Well, welcome to the difficulty of faith. Welcome to our sinful nature overcoming the Spirit of truth and wonder in us so that we question the power and good of the Lord God. All because we think we know better, we see more clearly, we really have the handle on what is to be and happen. All because we forget the majesty and wonder of the Lord!

All I can say is that Elijah is so human. He is David who takes another’s wife. He is Solomon who forgets his wisdom is from God. He is the whole population of Israel who turns away from God. He is all the disciples of Jesus who walked away offended because they couldn’t understand. He is Peter who denied before a young girl. He is the eleven disciples hiding and filled with fear after Jesus dies. He is doubting Thomas, and gospel denying Peter all wrapped up in one. He is a man, who forgets his desperate, sinful need for the Savior.

What a lesson the Lord God teaches. Did you see it? I must confess that over the years I have not really understood what the Lord was doing when he put on the display that He did before Elijah. It was masterful! The wind that tore up the rocks of the mountain. What power and majesty this was. We are told that the Lord was not in the wind, but I think now what that means is that the Lord’s presence was not there although his power and abilities were certainly on display. The same with the earthquake and with the fire. (And just ask yourself, “What is there on a mountain, a bare mountain that can burn?” And yet there was fire. It was miraculous, sweeping, burning fire!) What a display. It was the best of the forces of nature, that clearly God showed power and control over, but the presence of the Lord, his goodness and awe, his compassion and grace, his love and beauty we are told were not there. It was the Lord doing these things. He was controlling and demonstrating his power even though we cannot and do not grasp his presence and majesty among them.

Then the still whispering voice. Here is the Lord. He is the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, and overflowing with mercy and truth, maintaining mercy for thousands, forgiving guilt and rebellion and sin. (Ex 34:6). The Lord is gentle, kind, and loving. He has great power. The Lord rules over all things. The Lord most often choses to reveal himself to us in a lowly, humble and whisper quiet way, DO NOT underestimate the Lord or doubt his plans and ways. The Lord is not weak and useless. The Lord is not unaware and helpless. The Lord is compassionate and caring.

We, who wrestle with faith and the many issues and problems before us, do we forget this truth of God? That God prefers to work in humble and lowly ways. Look at Jesus. The Son of God, the fullness of God was and is in Jesus. Born of poor parents and raised in a nothing town. His looks were deceiving in the sense that we could not see or grasp his vastness and glory in that human form. But this God of ours died for us. Jesus, crucified like a great criminal, became the atoning sacrifice for our sins, indeed, even the sins of the whole world. Jesus did not come as the tearing wind, the upsetting earthquake or the destroying fire. Jesus came like that still, gentle whisper. Jesus does not work in us by a show of force. He comes to us in His Word and sacraments, to heal our souls, soothe our fears, guide us in our ways and turn our hearts to his love and grace. That is Jesus and even the Lord before Elijah. Gentle. Quiet. Loving. But make no mistake, the Lord is powerful and majestic. The Lord does indeed cause nations to fall and rise. The Lord determines the paths the world will take and all the events of whatever happens because of the hand or allowance of the Lord our God. The Lord is always at work, often quietly, as is evidenced by the fact that there were still some 7,000 believers in the Lord when Elijah thought he was alone. DO NOT underestimate the Lord!

Please note that Elijah is renewed and strengthened in his task and ministry, in his following of the Lord. You will not find Elijah again carrying on in this way. From this point forward he simply follows and trust in God in everything. And yes, Elijah does exactly as the Lord asks in these words. And just so you know, even though eventually Elijah is going to be taken directly to heaven in a whirlwind, it will be quite a number of years before that happens. He will appoint and tutor Elisha as his replacement. He will be instrumental in dealing with Ahaziah, the son of Ahab who rules. And when Ahaziah sends soldiers to round Elijah up, twice the soldiers get burned up by fire from heaven. As I can best calculate it, Elijah will stay in the service of the Lord for at least another 5 years before being taken up to heaven.

So in these words, we learn of our weaknesses and we learn of the Lord’s strength. Hear and follow the quiet, gracious Words of the Lord. Let the Lord be your strength and your guide, your confidence and sure defense. Trust in the Lord and all will be well. Trust the lowly, humble words of the Bible, that still whisper of God’s greatness that is found in our world. Amen.