

Sunday, August 9, 2020

Lectionary 19, Year A

Introduction

Elijah finds the presence of God not in earthquake, wind, or fire, but in the sound of sheer silence. When the disciples face a great storm on the sea, they cry out with fear. Jesus says: "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid." Amid the storms of life, we gather to seek the calm presence of Christ that soothes our fears. In comforting words of scripture and in the refreshing bread and cup of the eucharist, God grants us peace and sends us forth to be a sign of God's presence to others.

Prayer of the Day

O God our defender, storms rage around and within us and cause us to be afraid. Rescue your people from despair, deliver your sons and daughters from fear, and preserve us in the faith of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.
Amen.

First Reading: 1 Kings 19:9-18

The historian of 1 Kings described the prophet Elijah as having faithfully preached the word of God to the evil king Ahab, his Phoenician wife Jezebel, and the many Baal-worshipping Israelites. Afraid of arrest by the queen, Elijah hid at Mount Horeb, another name for Mount Sinai. But this time no fire and smoke show God's power. Rather, Elijah's encounter with "sheer silence" calls him back to his prophetic tasks among a people unfaithful to the LORD God.

The narrative of Elijah encountering only sheer silence is an ironic tale in the genre of theophanies that show divine power through the forces of nature. Matthew's story of the stilling of the tempest fits more traditionally into a religious expectation that God has power over nature. The lectionary appoints both.

⁹At [Horeb, the mount of God,][Elijah] 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?" ¹⁰He 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."

¹¹He 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; ¹²and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. ¹³When 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?” ¹⁴He 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.” ¹⁵Then the LORD said to him, “Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus; when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael as king over Aram. ¹⁶Also you shall anoint Jehu son of Nimshi as king over Israel; and you shall anoint Elisha son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah as prophet in your place. ¹⁷Whoever escapes from the sword of Hazael, Jehu shall kill; and whoever escapes from the sword of Jehu, Elisha shall kill. ¹⁸Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him.”

Psalm: Psalm 85:8-13

I will listen to what the LORD God is saying. (Ps. 85:8)

⁸I will listen to what the LORD | God is saying;
for you speak peace to your faithful people
and to those who turn their | hearts to you.

⁹**Truly, your salvation is very near to | those who fear you,
that your glory may dwell | in our land. R**

¹⁰Steadfast love and faithfulness have | met together;
righteousness and peace have | kissed each other.

¹¹**Faithfulness shall spring up | from the earth,
and righteousness shall look | down from heaven.**

¹²The LORD will indeed | grant prosperity,
and our land will | yield its increase.

¹³**Righteousness shall go be- | fore the LORD
and shall prepare for | God a pathway. R**

Second Reading: Romans 10:5-15

Paul's letter to the Romans continues by clarifying what he means by the gospel of righteousness through faith. Paul discourages a kind of literalist interest in where the risen Christ currently resides. Instead, he proclaims the existential power of

the good news about faith in Christ preached here and now to Jew and Gentile alike.

We assemble on Sunday to hear the very word of which Paul speaks. Today our faith in Christ saves us; now we hear God's sheer silence; now the storm is stilled.

⁵Moses writes concerning the righteousness that comes from the law, that “the person who does these things will live by them.” ⁶But the righteousness that comes from faith says, “Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’” (that is, to bring Christ down) ⁷“or ‘Who will descend into the abyss?’” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). ⁸But what does it say?

“The word is near you,
on your lips and in your heart”

(that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); ⁹because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. ¹¹The scripture says, “No one who believes in him will be put to shame.” ¹²For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. ¹³For, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

¹⁴But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? ¹⁵And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”

Gospel: Matthew 14:22-33

Matthew's story of Jesus walking on the water recalls Old Testament descriptions of God as the one who controls the chaotic seas. The Greek of Jesus' response to the frightened disciples echoes the Hebrew name of God, “I am.” Matthew has added to Mark's telling of this narrative an episode with Peter, a leader in the early church who is shown to be also a doubter. Once again, Matthew's interest in church leadership is evident.

Jesus' power over nature, his claim “I am,” and his rescue of Peter proclaim that Jesus is divine. The sea is our chaos, Peter's doubt our own. With Peter we ask Jesus to save us, and with the disciples we acclaim him the Son of God. “Do not be afraid,” Jesus says both to the disciples in the boat and to the women at the empty tomb.

²²[Jesus] made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side [of the Sea of Galilee], while he dismissed the crowds.²³ And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone,²⁴ but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them.²⁵ And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea.²⁶ But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, “It is a ghost!” And they cried out in fear.²⁷ But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, “Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.”

²⁸Peter answered him, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.”²⁹ He said, “Come.” So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus.³⁰ But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, “Lord, save me!”³¹ Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?”³² When they got into the boat, the wind ceased.³³ And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”

Copyright © 2020 Augsburg Fortress. All rights reserved. Reprinted by permission under Augsburg Fortress Liturgies Annual License #SAS010157.

New Revised Standard Version Bible, Copyright © 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Revised Common Lectionary, Copyright © 1992 Consultation on Common Texts, admin Augsburg Fortress. Used by permission.