

**Sermon preached by The Rev. Charles Rowins at St. Christopher-by-the-Sea, Gibson Island, Maryland, 12<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost, August 12, 2018.**

Our lessons today feature three gutsy characters. By “gutsy,” I mean that these three individuals – Elijah, Paul and Jesus - had a message of faith and hope that they delivered, each in a challenging, sometimes hostile, environment. Their courage is admirable, and worthy of our attention and perhaps emulation.

Elijah was a prophet in the 9<sup>th</sup> century BC. A really interesting person. He believed that God wanted him to lift the spirits of his fellow Hebrews during a period when the Hebrew faith was under attack. He did this heavy lifting in a variety of ways. In this morning’s lesson (**I Kings 19:4-8**), he shared an experience of doubt. The doubt was so deep that he didn’t want to carry on. “It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my ancestors.”

He was depressed and didn’t think he had the energy to keep going. If we don’t know this feeling ourselves, we certainly have seen others express it. Sometimes folks are just tired, tired of pain, tired of being a burden, tired of not knowing what is next, tired of not being able to help those they love, tired of knowing that they could have done things differently for themselves and others but didn’t. Life gets heavy.

In the midst of this depression, an angel speaks: “Get up and eat.” Elijah ate and drank, and lay down again. The angel came a second time, touched him, and said, “Get up and eat, otherwise the journey will be too much for you.” He got up, and ate and drank; then he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights.” With God’s help, Elijah lived to proclaim the love of God another day, another year.

“Get up and eat.” “One foot in front of the other.” “You can do it.” We have had this said to us, and we have said it to others. Maybe we’re saying it to people right now. Never an easy conversation to have, whether you’re receiving advice or giving it. It takes guts to listen and to speak. It’s good therefore to be reminded of people like Elijah who knew both roles.

St. Paul was a gutsy person too. The hostile environment for Paul was a combination of people who just didn’t believe that Jesus had risen from the dead and people who accepted the miracle once but were having trouble sustaining this belief. Paul’s advice to both non-believer and shaky-believer was to lead a life that would invite people to ask “Where do you get your strength?” From Ephesians (**Ephesians 4:25-5:2**): “So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors,

for we are members of one another. Be angry, yes, but do not sin. Don't let the sun go down on your anger, and do not make room for the devil. Share with the needy. And let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up. In short, be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us."

You might recognize this last verse. It is our weekly offertory sentence: Walk in love as Christ loved us, and gave himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God."

Following his conversion on the road to Damascus, Paul went all over the place, giving this advice. Some authorities got tired listening to him. He would be killed for not keeping quiet. Gutsy indeed.

Then we have Jesus, as recorded in John's gospel (**John 6:35, 41-51**). If you want to get noticed, if you want to poke the authorities, secular or religious, if you want to cut your life short, tell people, over and over, that you are the bread that came down from heaven, and that whoever eats of this bread will live forever. You are guaranteed an audience. And, if you keep it up, this audience will turn from curiosity to indifference to anger. The road will get tougher and tougher. It was so for Jesus. He invited trouble and he got it.

Our belief is, however, that the message, which Jesus put in the face of people, was the Truth. He was God's Son. He was God incarnate, in human flesh. He was the Messiah. And he not only "was" these things; he "is" these things. He is the Son of God. He is God in human flesh. He is the Messiah, the Savior. That conviction on his part, coupled with the reality of the Resurrection and the Gift of the Holy Spirit, account for you and me being here this morning.

All would say that Jesus had guts. Some would say that he was crazy as well. But others would say that he had Truth on his side. He was and is Truth. Being gutsy is a whole different ball game when you are speaking the Truth.

Today's Psalm (**Psalm 34:1-8**) reflects this confidence. "Taste and see that the Lord is good; happy are they who trust in him!" Which leads me to a "Taste and see" story, which I perhaps have shared before. If so, I apologize.

Before I decided to seek ordination, I was an active lay person in a parish in Las Vegas, where I was working. I taught Sunday School, led Evening Prayer once a week, and sang in the choir. I enjoyed these volunteer efforts, in part because either there

weren't very many people – think Friday afternoon prayer service - or there were lots of people with more talent and experience – think choir.

Well, at one rehearsal, the choir director introduced the offertory piece for the following Sunday. “O taste and see, that the Lord is good.” No problem, I thought. I can handle that as a one of many singers. Then the choir director noted that the piece began with a four-word solo: “O taste and see.” He then looked at me and said “I would like you, Mr. Rowins, to sing these words.”

Well, there was no “gutsy” at that point, just sheer panic. I was a mess from Thursday rehearsal to Sunday morning. Not only did I have to sing these four words, I had to hit a note without accompaniment. Four words and one note. That was it. A piece of cake for most. A mountain for me.

Well, Sunday came, and somehow I found the note, and sang the four words, and swore that I would never agree to that role again. Gutsy? Like Elijah? Like Paul? Like Jesus? No way. Pathetic? Yes.

Yet, the Church still ordained me. Go figure. Not to sing four-word solos, mind you, but to do my best, in concert with you all and other believers around the world and over many centuries to do these things: bolster spirits, as Elijah did; love others as Christ loved us, as Paul proclaimed; and eat with thanksgiving the bread that comes down from heaven, Jesus himself.

Not an easy assignment for Elijah, Paul and Jesus. And not an easy assignment for you and me. But, we do have models of obedience and courage, and having models, having examples, is critical. Can you imagine a world without models, without examples? Can you imagine a teaching moment where “Take so and so, for example” wasn't an option for the teacher? Can you imagine a learning moment where “Can you please give me an example” wasn't an option for the learner? Can you imagine a society where no one takes a risk? No role models? No heroes? No saints? No Arlington National Cemetery? No Elijah, Paul and Jesus?

We need gutsy, courageous, “Here I am, take me” people, and, thanks be to God, we have them. God calls and they answer. We call them saints, people set apart for a noble purpose. Not those frightened by four little words, but people like those in our final hymn today. People “who toiled and fought and lived and died for the Lord they loved and knew.” People who inspire us, in the words of the hymn, “to be one too.” Amen.

