

Almighty God, You resist the proud and give grace to the humble: Deliver us when we draw near to You from all self-sufficiency and spiritual pride; and grant us an ever deepening sense of our own unworthiness and of Your unfailing mercy; through Him who is our only righteousness, Your Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (Parish Prayers, ed. Frank Colquhoun, p. 117)

And behold, the word of the LORD came to [Elijah], and He said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" He said, "I have been very jealous for the LORD, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, thrown down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away." And He said, "Go out and stand on the mount before the LORD." And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks 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. And after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire the sound of a low whisper. And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. And behold, there came a voice to him and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" He said, "I have been very jealous for the LORD, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, thrown down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away." And the LORD said to him, "Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus. And when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael to be king over Syria. And Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall anoint to be king over Israel, and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah you shall anoint to be prophet in your place. And the one who escapes from the sword of Hazael shall Jehu put to death, and the one who escapes from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha put to death. Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him."

In Christ Jesus, who is God's Gentle Whisperer who bespeaks life, truth and salvation unto us, dear fellow redeemed:

At times we read in the Gospel that Jesus told His followers not to speak of His miracles to others. In Matthew 12 we read a quote from Isaiah, which explains this strange appearing directive: "Behold, My servant whom I have chosen, My Beloved with whom My soul is well pleased. I will put My Spirit upon Him, and He will proclaim justice to the Gentiles. He will not quarrel or cry aloud, nor will anyone hear His voice in the streets; a bruised reed He will not break, and a smoldering wick He will not quench, until He brings justice to victory." Jesus, our brother in the flesh, did not come to bark out orders nor make loud condemning pronouncements to frighten us

sinner, but to speak softly the words of forgiveness, life and salvation. He was not the modern street corner judgment preacher.

Elijah was taught a valuable lesson in the face of such resisting voices of unbelief. God does not intend to deal with us in mighty winds, powerful earthquakes and raging fires. All such means create fear and despair. So as God came to Elijah in a low gentle whisper, he was taught what we also observe in our Gospel lesson in the contrast between the Pharisee and the tax collector: **Humble Voices of Repentance Prevail, Not Loud Proud Voices.**

## I

Elijah had been driven to despair by the loud proud voices of the prophets of Baal, King Ahab, and especially Queen Jezebel. He had been part of the great demonstration of God's power and might on Mt. Carmel, when the prophets of Baal were brought low calling upon their god to ignite the altar placed before it. Even though Elijah was instrumental in shutting the mouths of these false prophets, the response of King Ahab and Queen Jezebel was to strike down Elijah. He ran for his life and he asked the Lord that he might die.

So in our text we read these words of his great depression: "I have been very jealous for the LORD, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, thrown down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away." It appeared to Elijah that he had failed in every way, even after the great burn-off on Mt. Carmel, the power of the unbelieving King and Queen seemed greater. Here he, the prophet of the Most High was running away for his life! How could it be characterized in any other way, but failure?

What failures shout out at you in your lives? You, Christian, have followed the Lord Jesus, even doing what you thought He has called you to do and you see failure in so many ways. It can be in your work, your family, your own personal struggle with sin. Again and again the loud voices of condemnation ring out almost celebrating your failures. Think of the loud voice of the Pharisee in our Gospel. He boasted of his many good works and pointed to the tax collector and condemned him with so many others. Elijah had the loud voices of Ahab and Jezebel speak their mighty thunder against him. Was there any escape but the peace of death, which God promises to us in His Anointed One, the Christ? While there is peace in death for us believers, we are not to seek it prematurely. But we are to leave it in the hands of the living God alone.

## II

The Lord God had his depressed prophet stand on the mountain and He passed by him. But contrary to the ways of man the Lord was not found in the wind, nor the earthquake, nor the fire. Rather the Lord came in that low gentle whisper which spoke confidently that the Lord had all things under control. The next kings of Syria and Israel were already known and awaiting for Elijah to anoint. On top of that God had also chosen Elijah's replacement as prophet – Elisha who would be anointed by Elijah as well. In addition the Lord informed Elijah what He had accomplished through the ministry of His faithful prophet: there were still “seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him.”

Now grant it, this was a small number in comparison to the total population, but God was about doing His saving work through His prophet despite what His enemies thought. They boasted, bragged, blustered and berated Elijah to the point of despair. But despair of one's own righteousness is a good thing, as we saw with the tax collector, who did not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and cried out: “God, have mercy on me the sinner.” Jesus declared this humble believer justified before God as he went to his house. The proud Pharisee left defeated in his unrepentant sin. Truly the humble voice of repentance prevails, not the loud proud voice.

Are you listening to the low gentle whisperer of God declaring you justified, my fellow sinners? The Apostle Paul speaks in such a tone for your blessing: “Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died – more than that, who was raised – who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? ... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.”

You and I cannot justify ourselves, only He who died and rose again for us is able to accomplish this eternal work. Consider how you often come to the Father and pray – forgive me my trespasses, and there at His right hand is your beloved substitutionary Intercessor, who nods to the Father having always exposed His nail pierced hands and feet. You are forgiven. You are justified. He lives having taken all your sins and your punishment to Himself, so you too shall live.

Elijah wanted God to end his life, feeling like such a disappointing defeated failure. Elijah was not speaking with a loud proud voice, but in a humble repentant tone. Nevertheless, God was

not going to be controlled by this voice of His faithful prophet as humble as it was. Elijah did not die, but our Lord took him directly to heaven with his body and soul still united.

*[In hushed tones:]*

*You are forgiven, for Jesus' sake.*

*You are justified, for Jesus' sake.*

*You too shall live, for Jesus' sake.*

*Your work in Christ in this life for His kingdom has all been done well for Jesus' sake.*

*You are ready at any time to die, but for now you serve a Lord who will use you in ways the world does not see.*

*Without realizing it the world sees your good works and glorifies your heavenly Father, for Jesus' sake.*

*Continue now in His peace.*

Go to your homes – knowing and trusting that for Jesus' sake you are justified. Amen.