

In Nomine Iesu

The Tenth Sunday after Holy Trinity 2026 Our gracious God gives grace to the humble – 1 Kings 18:16-39

“When Ahab saw Elijah, Ahab said to him, ‘Is it you, you troubler of Israel?’ And he answered, ‘I have not troubled Israel, but you have, and your father’s house, because you have abandoned the commandments of the Lord and followed the Baals. Now therefore send and gather all Israel to me at Mount Carmel, and the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel’s table.’

So Ahab sent to all the people of Israel and gathered the prophets together at Mount Carmel. And Elijah came near to all the people and said, ‘How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him.’ And the people did not answer him a word. Then Elijah said to the people, ‘I, even I only, am left a prophet of the Lord, but Baal’s prophets are 450 men. Let two bulls be given to us, and let them choose one bull for themselves and cut it in pieces and lay it on the wood, but put no fire to it. And I will prepare the other bull and lay it on the wood and put no fire to it. And you call upon the name of your god, and I will call upon the name of the Lord, and the God who answers by fire, he is God.’ And all the people answered, ‘It is well spoken.’ Then Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, ‘Choose for yourselves one bull and prepare it first, for you are many, and call upon the name of your god, but put no fire to it.’ And they took the bull that was given them, and they prepared it and called upon the name of Baal from morning until noon, saying, ‘O Baal, answer us!’ But there was no voice, and no one answered. And they limped around the altar that they had made. And at noon Elijah mocked them, saying, ‘Cry aloud, for he is a god. Either he is musing, or he is relieving himself, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened.’ And they cried aloud and cut themselves after their custom with swords and lances, until the blood gushed out upon them. And as midday passed, they raved on until the time of the offering of the oblation, but there was no voice. No one answered; no one paid attention.

Then Elijah said to all the people, ‘Come near to me.’ And all the people came near to him. And he repaired the altar of the Lord that had been thrown down. Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of the Lord came, saying, ‘Israel shall be your name,’ and with the stones he built an altar in the name of the Lord. And he made a trench about the altar, as great as would contain two seahs of seed. And he put the wood in order and cut the bull in pieces and laid it on the wood. And he said, ‘Fill four jars with water and pour it on the burnt offering and on the wood.’ And he said, ‘Do it a second time.’ And they did it a second time. And he said, ‘Do it a third time.’ And they did it a third time. And the water ran around the altar and filled the trench also with water. And at the time of the offering of the oblation, Elijah the prophet came near and said, ‘O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that you are God in Israel, and that I am your servant, and that I have done all these things at your word. Answer me, O Lord, answer me, that this people may know that you, O Lord, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back.’ Then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, ‘The Lord, he is God; the Lord, he is God.’”

Grace be to you and peace from God the Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the God of Elijah and of all the faithful of Israel. Dear fellow redeemed:

King Ahab sent 450 prophets to answer Elijah’s challenge on Mt. Carmel and prove to Israel that their gods, Baal and, by association, his consort Asherah, were greater than Yahweh, the one true God, the God of Abraham. Baal, actually just means, “Lord,” in

Hebrew or Phoenician. But that title became over time the common way people referred to the chief god of Canaanites. The religion of Canaan was similar to the religions of the nations around Israel, but it was completely unlike that of the Old Testament Scriptures. Canaanite religion embraced many gods and goddesses, cultic prostitution, and child sacrifice. It was the religion of the original Canaanite population of Israel. In Elijah's day it was the religion also of Ahab's Canaanite wife, Jezebel, who dominated Ahab.

I

Less than fifty years after Jeroboam had led the ten tribes of Israel into corrupting the worship God commanded Moses to maintain, Ahab came to the throne in the northern kingdom. To cement an alliance with the various Canaanite kingdoms in the area, his father, King Omri, arranged a marriage between his son, Ahab, and the Phoenician king Ethbaal's daughter, Jezebel. Unsurprisingly, she brought her religion with her, complete with, as our text notes, 450 priests of Baal and 400 of Asherah. As it turned out, it was quite easy to introduce pagan practices into Israel beside the corrupted worship practice of Jeroboam. And so, the sin of Jeroboam grew more perverse as each year passed.

Despite Israel's unfaithfulness God sent Elijah to King Ahab time and again to awaken his conscience to do what is right and lead his people back. But Ahab in his pride did not listen to Elijah, whom he called the "troubler of Israel." Finally, Elijah challenged him to demonstrate which was the true religion of Israel, that still being practiced in Jerusalem's temple or that being practiced by the Canaanite priests in Samaria whom Ahab and, especially, the evil Jezebel sponsored. Weak-willed Ahab, caught between his ambitious wife and his own pride, agreed to accept the challenge.

In a way the contest on Mt. Carmel is like the miracles of Jesus. To be sure, the miracles of Jesus amazed the crowds, as the evangelists record. But to be amazed is not the same as to believe. The high priests, elders, scribes and Pharisees were not moved by Jesus' miracles. Each time He miraculously enabled a lame person to walk or a blind one to see, they demanded another miracle to the point where as Jesus was being crucified they jeered and mocked, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the king of Israel, let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him." (Matthew 27:42) Their prideful confidence in themselves overcame any trust they had in the word of God whose predicted miracles clearly pointed to Jesus as the promised Messiah.

But what we see on Mt. Carmel is the opposite of what we see at Mt. Calvary. The one who mocks is Elijah! He said, "'Choose for yourselves one bull and prepare it first, for you are many, and call upon the name of your god, but put no fire to it.' And they took the bull that was given them, and they prepared it and called upon the name of Baal from morning until noon, saying, 'O Baal, answer us!' But there was no voice, and no one answered. And they limped around the altar that they had made. And at noon Elijah mocked them, saying, 'Cry aloud, for he is a god. Either he is musing, or he is relieving himself, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened.'" Elijah's mockery showed them to be frauds in the eyes of all who were witnesses there.

Still "they cried aloud and cut themselves after their custom with swords and lances, until the blood gushed out upon them. And as midday passed, they raved on until the time of the offering of the oblation, but there was no voice. No one answered; no one paid attention." There is an old saying, "Pride feels no pain," that is, our pride often causes us not to admit our weakness, suffering or failure to others for fear of losing their respect. Clearly, the priests of Baal feared losing the respect not only of the people, but of Ahab and, most fearfully of all, Jezebel. And the people just watched in silence.

II

Then it was Elijah's turn. He had the sacrifice, wood, and altar triply soaked in water, and prayed once to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: "Then the fire of the Lord

fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, 'The Lord, he is God; the Lord, he is God.'"

Today we call Elijah's method apologetics. He was showing people, including the king the falsity of any religion that opposes that of the true God. Now it would be satisfying if Ahab had repented, rejected his wife's evil, and led the people back to faithfulness. But it didn't happen. The faithful in Israel remained faithful, 7000 as the Bible tells us, but there was no reformation. God's purpose was to turn people away from the false and look only to the true, for only the truth of God's word can turn unbelief into faith. The faithful in Israel turned to the truth. But all the evil consequences of Jeroboam's sin just grew worse until God destroyed the northern kingdom, humbled the southern one, and finally raised up a faithful King, Josiah, a faithful high priest, Hilkiah, and a faithful prophet, Jeremiah, all at the same time just before He allowed the Babylonian army to conquer Judah and take His people into captivity. He had given them a glimpse of what was to come. The true Savior of Israel pictured in the time of Josiah when Israel had a faithful Prophet, Priest and King all at the same time, pointed to the One who would Himself be all three **in the same Person**, Jesus Christ! But His time was not yet, but it was drawing closer. People were to trust the promise of God, He would not fail.

To repeat what has been said several times over the last many weeks we have looked at the Old Testament, the Apostle Paul said to us, "Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come." (1 Corinthians 10:11) The Old Testament is filled with many things worthy of our study and meditation. The greatest of which are the many times God in His mercy gave His Old Testament people glimpses of the Savior whom He promised to the world from the time man first sinned. He did this to prepare the world to recognize its Savior from sin, death, and hell when He appeared.

But another very great insight God gave us is the nature of fallen man's pride. We see it in story after story, tragedy after tragedy. As we listen to each sad story, each tragedy, David's words in the psalm cries out, "In the **pride** of his face the wicked does not seek him; all his thoughts are, 'There is no God.'" (Psalm 10:4) This is the pride that God's miracle on Mt. Carmel should destroy in the minds of all, leaving us without any hope in this world for a way out of our misery and fear of death. And the truth is that is just what God's law does. It strips away all our foolish pride, all our baseless ideas, all our false hopes that something in this world can save us. And leaves us with ... what?

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Dear friends, the words of the people that day on Mt. Carmel still echo, "The Lord, he is God; the Lord, he is God." But where is He to be found in this deceptive and confusing world? He is, as He was then, not far away. In Ahab and Elijah's day He dwelt among His people in the temple in Jerusalem, accessible, approachable, yes, even welcoming. His prophets and faithful priests proclaimed that to all. In our day, the Apostle Paul assures us, "But what does it say? 'The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart' (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." That word of promise is near you. For Christ, the promised Prophet, Priest, and King, has come into the world. He has lived and died for you to save you from death. And He has sent His messengers into all the world to proclaim that truth to you. You will not find hope in this world, earthly help, but He has come into our world **from heaven** to give you what you could not find here. Simply believe Him. For "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." (James 4:6) Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria