

Before we get going, I think some crib notes on the prophet Elijah might be in order... because our reading today from 1 Kings picks up a story that's well in-progress –

Generations before Elijah was born, God warned the ancient Israelites through the prophet Samuel, all about the very terrible things that would happen if they insisted on living under the rule of a king, the rule of someone whose power is wielded unchecked. The people ignored God, and they demanded a king so they could show their power just like all the other nations around them. Things started out kinda ok, but by the time we get mid-way through the book of 1 Kings, it's starting to go really quite horribly wrong. In the Biblical accounts of the kings, there's often a prophet, chosen and sent by God, to point out to the King of the moment, all their errant ways. The prophet reminds the King of the Covenant with God, they point out idolatrous behavior, that's always everywhere, and they hold the king accountable for morally dubious or unjust actions; and this role, the role of prophet, is usually very dangerous indeed.

We drop into the story of those first Kings in the middle of the reign of King Ahab, who 'married out' taking Jezebel, the daughter of the King of Sidon to be his Queen. That's Sidon of "Tyre and Sidon" the traditional arch-enemy of the ancient Israelites, a notoriously wealth-loving people, opposed most fiercely for their worship of the false God, Baal. Tyre and Sidon are short-hand all through Scripture for idol worship, for arrogance, and for oppression, all that is anti-thetical to way of life laid out by God in the Covenant – this is what King Ahab, king of Israel chose to marry into. And as soon as Ahab, king of Israel starts worshipping Baal himself, Elijah arrives on the scene.

After doing a bunch of miraculous things to prove his prophet status, Elijah and King Ahab finally meet in a show-down of prophets, it's Elijah vs 450 prophets of the false God Baal. Elijah is the clear winner, and the 450 false prophets lose their lives. Queen Jezebel is furious and sends a clear message to Elijah that she's after him. After all he's done up to this point, now having to run from Jezebel proves to be too much - Elijah is done, he's out of energy and he asks God to let him die... but Elijah is needed, his story is far from over, so he's fed by angel, who tells him to eat, or the journey will be too much... the journey for those who bear prophetic witness is effortful, and there will be discomfort and risk along the way. God sees to it that Elijah is fed, must be fed, knowing he won't be able to continue his important work unless he is.

There is a prophetic element to all our lives as Christians, prophetic witness isn't limited to the folks in the Bible, or to those great individuals who by their own massive and committed efforts have played a role in transforming society.

Yet, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr, disturbingly, yet accurately, once preached that "many people fear nothing more terribly than to take a position that stands out sharply and clearly from the prevailing opinion."<sup>1</sup> And yet taking such a stand is our call, it's the bare minimum, it's the promise at the very heart of every Christian life.

Our Baptismal Covenant has us promise - to proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ, and to strive for justice and peace among all people ... to strive for justice and peace, not just think about it, hope for it, pray for it. We're called, all of us, to strive for it.

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Luther King Jr, *Strength to Love*, (Fortress Press, Minneapolis: 2010), 14.

And, although perhaps not raised up to be renowned, history-making prophets, we are all called to play a prophetic role in the transformation, the healing and the restoration of the world. And to do that, to follow Jesus on the Way, we're *all*, in our own way, called

to speak truth to power,  
called to defend those who are oppressed, neglected, rejected, abused  
called to challenge injustice whenever and wherever we encounter it,  
and we are called to embody and proclaim God's new Creation, God's Kingdom reality.

And to do this we, just like Elijah, we must be fed ... or the journey will be too much.

We must be fed, or we may never even really begin the journey.

Each Sunday we're fed by the sacrament of Holy Communion, with that bread which is the life-giving body of Christ. Each day we're offered the spiritual nourishment of Scripture and in the Prayers when we pray with Christians everywhere the words of the Daily Office. Every time we say the Lord's Prayer we repeat the words "give us this day our daily bread." Whenever we gather together as living members of the body of Christ, we're fed, together, by our support for one another, by our friendship, and by love. When we're out in the world, we're fed when we engage in acts of service, taking care of the stranger, folks who have need. And we are fed when we connect with Creation, drawing strength from the planet what sustains us. This is the sustenance we need for the journey.

When Jesus sent out the twelve on their first healing mission to proclaim the Kingdom of God, he was clear, “Take nothing for your journey; no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money – not even an extra tunic.”<sup>2</sup> Jesus makes it clear, we can’t actually take the journey we need to take if we depend on the stuff of the world, it will not feed us. We can’t begin the journey if we insist on having a safety net before we even get going, clinging to things we think will protect us and keep us safe; it’s a false security, it will not feed us. We can’t stave off the difficulty of the journey with things, with the stuff of the world, no idol can keep us safe, no idol can feed in the way we need. The more ‘stuff’ we surround ourselves with, attempt to protect ourselves with, and attempt to cling onto, the more we will feel we have to lose by speaking up and speaking out; the more we will feel we have to lose by truly following Jesus on the Way.

There is nothing we can ‘carry’ that will protect us from the real-life consequences of bearing prophetic witness, the consequences of resisting the many temptations and superficial comforts of remaining in the dead-zone of polite co-existence, instead of taking a bold and courageous step on the journey into life-giving, transformational relationship.

Similarly, there’s no consequence, however daunting and intimidating the prophetic journey may seem, there is no consequence of the prophetic journey that can prevent us knowing the exquisite depths of joy that are possible as we are healed, and our relationship with God restored, there is no consequence that can come between us and our freedom and fullness of life in Christ.

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<sup>2</sup> Luke 9:3

Dr. King points out and warns that, "... we are gravely mistaken [if we] think that Christianity protects us from the pain and agony of mortal existence"<sup>3</sup> and he says that we "need to recapture the gospel glow of the early Christians ... willingly they sacrificed fame, fortune and life itself on behalf of a cause they knew to be right."<sup>4</sup>

That gospel glow. What would it be to seek that out, to get adequate spiritual nourishment, to be so well fed that it's visible for all the world to see? ... well-enough fed that we are made ready for the prophetic journey, for what inevitably lay ahead on that path, well enough fed that whatever we face it'll not ever be too much..

The mighty hand of our Creator God protect you,  
the deep peace of our Savior Christ be with you,  
and the guiding power of the Holy Spirit strengthen you for the journey.  
And the blessing of God...

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<sup>3</sup> *Strength to Love*, 19

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 16