**Blain Bargo Message Notes from February 21, 2021
I’m Giving Up**

Passages:

First Scripture: Genesis 9:8-17

Second Scripture: 1Kings 19:1-13

Prayer

A covenant made by God to Noah, his family and us today is what our scripture reading was about this morning. This text was recommended by the lectionary schedule, a schedule of scriptures for each Sunday in a three-year cycle. We are reminded often through-out the year in the amazing views of rainbows of the covenant that God has made with us. There are two rainbows that I distinctly remember, the latest one being sighted to the east from Dillsburg during the last hours of Farmers Fair in 2018. It was a sight, seeing it over the town’s buildings. Amidst the dark clouds there were two bows, a brighter one on the lower end and a faint one above it. The other rainbow that I remember distinctly had happened a few years earlier during an evening of Vacation Bible School. A lot of pictures were taken that evening as we saw such a prominent colorful rainbow in the fields outside our church building. I do not remember for sure but thinking back we may have missed out on a great teaching moment to the children that were in attendance that night. The covenant that God promised to Noah and his family extends to us yet today.

But this morning I want to share about someone whom scripture says has a nature like yours and mine. The prophet Elijah can be found in the midst of eight chapters starting in 1Kings 17 going through to 2 Kings 2. References to Elijah can also be found in several scriptures in the New Testament. It is in James 5:**17** that we read that Elijah was like you and I. From Eugene Peterson’s translation in The Message we read, “Elijah, for instance, human just like us, prayed hard that it wouldn't rain, and it didn't - not a drop for three and a half years.”

Several weeks ago, Pastor Tim mentioned to us about a woman named Jezebel and how evil she was to the prophets of God. She was married to King Ahab and persuaded the king to introduce Baal worship amongst the Israelite’s. She would try to destroy anyone who would come against her beliefs, and this is where the prophet Elijah entered the events of a few years. We will look briefly at four events leading up to our text in 1Kings that show us the kind of prophet Elijah was. Let us first hear todays Word as found in 1Kings 19: 1-13.

**1** Now Ahab told Jezebel everything Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword.

**2** So Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah to say, “May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them.”

**3** Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there,

**4** while he himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness. He came to a broom bush, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. “I have had enough, LORD,” he said. “Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors.”

**5** Then he lay down under the bush and fell asleep. All at once an angel touched him and said, “Get up and eat.”

**6** He looked around, and there by his head was some bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again.

**7** The angel of the LORD came back a second time and touched him and said, “Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you.”

**8** So he got up and ate and drank. Strengthened by that food, he traveled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God.

**9** There he went into a cave and spent the night. And the word of the LORD came to him: “What are you doing here, Elijah?”

**10** He replied, “I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.”

**11** The LORD said, “Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by.” Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake.

**12** After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper.

**13** When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave. Then a voice said to him, “What are you doing here, Elijah?”

 The four events that lead up to this point in scripture help us in understanding the character of the Prophet Elijah. I would encourage you to read the passages of scripture starting at 1Kings 17 to the point of our reading today as we will only touch them briefly.

The first character trait of Elijah is that he is firm in his belief and convictions. Just as he comes to us in scripture in the 1st verse of Kings 17, we find him approaching King Ahab and saying, “As the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve.” Elijah being a prophet of God went to the king who was promoting Baal worship and left him know who he would serve.

Event #1, going to King Ahab and telling him the words of God about a drought to take place due to the sinful acts being promoted. Elijah’s character, conviction of the law of God.

The second character trait of Elijah is one of compassion. 1Kings 17: 9-16 gives us the details of the interactions between a widow and Elijah. Elijah had asked for a drink and also some bread while the widow barely had enough for herself and her son. Hear these words that Elijah spoke. “For this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: ‘the jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the Lord sends rain on the land.’”

Event #2, nourishment for a widow and her son. Elijah’s character, compassion.

The third character trait of Elijah is that of a prayer warrior. 1Kings 17:19-21, “’Give me your son’, Elijah replied. He took him from her arms, carried him to the upper room where he was staying, and laid him on his bed. Then he cried out to the Lord, ‘Lord my God , have you brought tragedy even on this widow I am staying with, by causing her son to die?’ Then he stretched himself out on the boy three times and cried out to the Lord. ‘Lord my God, let this boy’s life return to him!’”

Event #3, widow’s son passes away. Elijah’s character, fervent prayer.

The fourth character trait of Elijah is one of fearlessness. Chapter 18 of 1Kings provides us with the details of one of the greatest miracles found in the old testament. While King Ahab and his wife Jezebel were having the Prophets of God slayed, Elijah presented himself to King Ahab with a challenge for Ahab’s prophets to call on their god to light a fire for a sacrificial bull and Elijah would call on the name of the Lord for lighting his fire. Which ever fire was lit was the true God. Verse 27 tells us that Elijah went as far as taunting Ahab’s prophets. Verse 27, “Shout louder! Surely he is a god! Perhaps he is in deep thought, or busy, or traveling, Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened.”

Event #4 Calling down fire to prove his God was the true God. Elijah’s character, fearlessness, fearless before all the evil around him.

After these events Elijah had the prophets of Baal slain. In total there were 850 prophets of Baal slain. This is where todays scripture picks up. We have read that Jezebel had sent a message to Elijah that his life would be like one of those of the prophets of Baal that were slain, so Elijah afraid for his life ran. He was ready to give up. He prayed that he might die, saying “I had enough Lord”. It is here that Elijah traveled for forty days and nights to reach the mountain of God.

Over this past year we all have had the experience of having to give up something due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Guidelines for getting together have been put in place. We may not have been able to visit with family and friends like we always did in the past. Vacations may have been canceled. The experience of giving up so much and living a new normal in the past year has created a lot of stress on many people. Now we come to a time of year where we are encouraged as Christians to give something up, but it is not the giving up that is to be the focus of our attention.

As I have been studying these passages, I have been praying about what I could learn and share about Elijah’s life that would benefit us in this time of Lent. I got to thinking of the practice of fasting or giving up something that takes my time away. There were three religious practices among the Jews, they were giving, fasting, and prayer. The expectation was there to be fasting. Jesus in Mathew 6:16 starts out by saying “When you fast”, because it was an expected practice. So through time and into this 21st century Christians have been encouraged to have a practice of abstaining from something for a 40-day period during Lent. This 40-day period is a time to remember all that Christ has done for us on the cross. It is a time of repentance, self-examination, and reflection. It is a time to draw close to the one whom we love.

In our western culture we have watered down the purpose of Lent. It has become an event that we have altered for our own purposes. We give up chocolate or sweets, or cappuccino, or maybe high carb items in our diet for the purpose of losing a few pounds. We give up some form of entertainment but fill the time with another form of entertainment. How many times do you hear someone say I gave that up for Lent? I’ve heard it plenty and most of the time in a sarcastic manor.

I don’t want to sound negative here this morning, but I do want to be bold. God desires for us to be intimate with Him. He wants us to lay it all out on the table, not holding anything back. It is usually when we are at our lowest point that giving it all over to God happens. We have become so self-sufficient in our lives that God becomes our last resort instead of our first. God’s focus is not about what we are giving up for this season if our attitudes are not ones that are meant to draw us closer to Him and give Him Glory. God not only desires but deserves to have all our praise offered to Him. Our fasting should not be a public scene but a personal experience with God. Mathew 6: continues, “anoint your head and wash your face so that your fasting will not be noticed by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.”

Fasting and prayer go hand-in-hand with each other. If you fast without prayer, you are just going hungry. If you are giving up activities and not using that time for prayer, you are just restraining from that activity. Fasting with prayer brings results. It allows for us to get attuned to hearing the voice of God, to understand his nudging’s. God will reveal in us areas of our lives that He wants us to let Him work with us on. It is a time that prepares our hearts to understand His will for our lives. It draws us into a more intimate relationship with Him.

In thinking about today’s message, a few nights ago during my sleep a thought came to me that I felt God wanted me to share. I wasn’t sure how it fit in until yesterday when going through my notes and I came across the three main religious practices among the Jews. Giving, Fasting and Prayer. Some years ago, I would listen daily to a radio broadcast by Larry Berkett. I think it was called Money Matters, A broadcast about Christian Financial concepts. Larry shared a story of a woman he had counseled that was questioning her responsibility of tithing because her husband was not a Christian and did not want their money to be used to support Christian based ministries. This woman was torn as she believed that it was her responsibility as a Christian to tithe. Larry had presented her with a challenge. She was to honor her husband’s wishes while proposing a plan of action to move towards tithing. She proposed to her husband to give 1% as a tithe for a set period of time, and if their finances proved to be not sufficient and giving the 1% created a hardship they would stop, but if they were being blessed by their giving, then they would increase their percentage. The story ended that not only had the family been blessed, and give much more than a tithe, but the husband had turned his life over to Christ and became a strong leader in their church.

Do we feel at times, what is the use, and maybe feel like giving up. Elijah showed us four-character traits, conviction, compassion, fervent prayer, and fearlessness. But even with these strong traits, Elijah was just like you and I. There came a time that he felt overwhelmed and ran. Just as Larry presented the woman he counseled to challenge her husband for God’s faithfulness, I would encourage and challenge us this morning to give up something, but not just for giving it up for Lent, but to use the time to be in prayer with God. Find the quiet place you need. Take His word with you and let it absorb into you. Sometimes we get ourselves so busy that prayer time, although we can pray at all times, is left to if we have time. In the stress of our everyday lives maybe we need to be like Elijah and say I give up. Elijah was led to the mountain of God to be in His presence and to hear from God. Faithful as Elijah was even in the midst of fearing for his life, He went. It took him 40 days and nights to reach the mountain. God had told him to go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by. He went through powerful wind, an earthquake, and through fire, and he did not see the Lord. But after the fire he heard a gentle whisper.

We at times create our own windstorms, our own earthquakes, and our own fires to put out, but as this season of Lent is upon us can we take the time to draw close to God, be bold and stand with conviction of the love and grace that Jesus so freely gave to us on that cross and hear the gentle voice of God calling us into a deeper relationship with Him. Do not let Him pass you by. He will be faithful.

 The combining of fasting and prayer is important because it enables us to gain: a closer relationship with God, spiritual breakthroughs, and a greater level of self-discipline. Take time during this season to hear God’s voice. Find your quite place so you can hear Him. Give up some of the confusion in your life and commit that time and space to listening for His gentle voice. God loves each one and wants to be intimate with us. Will you allow it during this season?

Shall we pray:

Benediction: Credit: Joanna Harader

Whatever wilderness the Spirit has brought you to:

Walk in boldness, as a beloved child of God

Walk in peace, under the shelter of the Most High

And walk-in faith, knowing Christ walks with you. Amen