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"Search for Elisha!"

1. Trusting that God has Provided the Message
2. Trusting that God Will Provide the Messenger

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Our lesson today focuses on one of my favorite people from the Bible – Elijah. He probably doesn't rank on your top ten list of *Who's Who in the Bible*, so let me retell some of his story, part of which you heard from the lectern earlier. Elijah served as a prophet to God's Old Testament people during the reign of King Ahab and his wicked wife Jezebel. Jezebel was a huge worshiper and promoter of the false god Baal. So one day Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal to a little competition. They hiked up Mt. Carmel and built altars to their respective gods and the competition was that whichever God (god) sent down fire to consume the sacrifice of the altar, that would be the true God. The Baal worshippers went first and their pleas fell on deaf ears. Then Elijah went, slapped his meat on the altar and then proceeded to have twelve large jars of water poured over his sacrifice so it was completely drenched. Then he prayed and the Lord sent such a terrific fire that not only did it consume the meat, it consumed the water, the wood, the soil and the stones of the altar. And the spectators cried, "The LORD – he is God! The LORD – he is God!" And they proceeded to slaughter the false prophets.

Shortly after that, Queen Jezebel heard the report from Mt. Carmel and subsequently she sent this message to Elijah, "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." The queen placed a priced tag on Elijah's head. So Elijah ran. He ran for his life. For forty days and forty nights he journeyed through the desert. And after spending forty days as a fugitive, the LORD came to him and asked him, "What's you doing, Elijah?" And Elijah gave this report... *"I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken 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."* What a sad report!

And then I read a report that came via email a few weeks ago, a report from our Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod – our church body that unites us with other Christians to share the message of Jesus with the world. Listen to excerpts, *"While offerings are up, we are behind inflation... over 130 pastoral vacancies remain after assignment day... over 150 teacher vacancies remain after assignment day... school enrollment at our synodical schools is the lowest it's been in a decade... birthrate continues to plummet... within a decade, WELS will be less than 300,000 people [pick anything from the Statistical Report]"* And I thought, what a sad report! What can we say? The report is accurate. There are no falsehoods in what our district president writes. How do we react? Let's turn to the Word. Let's turn to the Word and see how our gracious LORD responded to the pessimistic report of Elijah.

I. TRUST THAT GOD HAS PROVIDED THE MESSAGE

Our lesson before us today reported that after Elijah gave his lament there was a powerful wind that tore apart the mountains, but the Lord wasn't in the wind. Then there was an earthquake, but the Lord wasn't in the earthquake. Then there was fire, but the Lord wasn't in the fire. Then there was a gentle whisper, a still small voice, and it was in the gentle whisper that we find the Lord. And this is what the Lord had to say. He told Elijah to go anoint a new king of Aram, whom the Lord would use to punish Israel for their faithlessness. He also told Elijah to go anoint a new king of Israel, to succeed the wicked Ahab. And he told Elijah to search for a fella by the name of Elisha, and anoint him as his successor, the next prophet of Israel. After giving these instructions, then the Lord had this to say. *"By the way, I reserve seven thousand in Israel – all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and all whose mouths have not kissed him."*

So what can we learn from this? One thing that we can learn is that we often look for God in the wrong places. We look for him with glitz and glamour, "God's going to do this for me or that. He's going to reward me with a financial windfall because I'm his child. He's going to give me good health because I trust in him. He's going to make me popular because I follow his will." While the Lord certainly can do and reveal himself in such ways, he often doesn't. Rather, he often chooses to speak through a gentle whisper – without flash, without glimmer. Think about how chose to introduce the King of Kings to this world. Jesus didn't come with trumpets blaring. His birth announcement didn't splash the front page. The paparazzi wasn't following the donkey of Mary & Joseph as they traveled to Bethlehem. The King of Kings arrived on the scene so humbly, so quietly. And that's how God often chooses to work. With the quiet whisper of his Word.

However, don't equate silence with ineffectiveness. In fact, some of the most effective leaders throughout history were soft-spoken people. So, too, the gentle whisper of God's Word is effective. We see that in the lesson before us. God gently whispers to Elijah, *"Seven thousand have not bowed down to Baal."* Isn't that amazing! In a country where the king and queen demanded that people follow Baal or off with your head, in those dire circumstances, 7000 were willing to stand up for the true God instead of bow down to a false one! God was showing Elijah that the gentle whisper of the Word was effective. And his Word, that quiet, is still effective today. Oh, maybe we don't see thousands of people lined up an hour before service trying to get in. We don't see droves of people flocking to Christian churches throughout our country or throughout our world. But I can assure you, the gentle whisper of the Word is still at work. The fact that you are here today, shows that your knees have not yet bowed down to the false gods. The gentle whisper of the Word has worked on our hearts. God has provided and continues to provide a message that leads us through life. And God has provided and continues to provide a message that leads us to life, life with him in heaven.

As awesome as a point that is, to marvel at God's patience and providence in seeing how he still speaks to us effectively through his Word, there's another point of the passages before us, which really is our theme for today. Not only does God provide for the message, we also are assured through this lesson that God provides the messenger. Look at the third thing God told Elijah to do. When Elijah thought he was the only one left, God said, "I've got your successor picked out. Search for Elisha." And that's what I'd like to talk to

you about a little today as well. How can we search for Elisha? How can we, look for or recruit messengers, trusting that just as God so graciously provided the message, he also will provide the messenger.

II. TRUST THAT GOD WILL PROVIDE THE MESSENGER

To answer that question, “How can we recruit messengers (or search for Elisha) trusting that God will provide messengers?” we first of all have to talk about individual roles as Christians. Understand the Bible says we all are God’s children, “chosen people of God” who are to “*declare the praises of him who called us out of darkness.*” All have us have been given the charge to *make disciples – make followers of Jesus* – by teaching them the truths of God’s Word. To praise, to teach, and to share the message of Jesus is the work of a Christian. It’s your work. It’s my work. But the way that is carried out can vary. The way that I live my faith, the way that I *declare praise to God and teach others about him* will depend on where the Lord has planted me. These ladies over here can declare praises to God by living their faith in their card club and the way they conduct themselves. This person can live his faith and make a follower of Jesus by the way he invites his co-workers to a Bible study. This mother can carry out her role as a Christian by teaching her children to pray. We all have vocations, we all have callings in which we individually can serve our Lord.

But while we all have individual roles, God also has established spiritual leadership positions to serve on behalf of the people. In the Old Testament, God set aside the tribe of Levi to serve as priests who would offer sacrifices and prayers to God on behalf of the people. Early in the New Testament, Jesus chose twelve 12 disciples to preach the Word on behalf of the people. Later on, Paul & Barnabas were sent as missionaries on behalf of the church. So, too, God still uses his church, his body of believers, to select servants to handle the Word of God and apply to their lives. And that’s an awesome responsibility. That’s an awesome privilege.

Therefore, God establishes for us in his Word some criteria for whom we choose as those messengers. In a lot of ways, it would be so much easier if God would still work the way he did in our lesson – if he said, “Go pick Elisha. He’s the next spiritual leader.” But in his wisdom, he doesn’t do that. He didn’t directly tell you to call your pastors and teachers as your pastors and teachers. He simply tells us in his Word, “*Entrust the things you have heard me say to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.*” And he leaves it up to us to figure out who those “reliable men” are. God’s direction tell us to search for these people, to search for our Elishas. So how do we, as people of God, go about doing that?

Well, if Elisha is our model, we see someone who was willing to be mentored. Someone who was willing to be trained for the task at hand. Currently, there are over 1000 people at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in Mequon, Martin Luther College in New Ulm, MN (of which two are members here), Luther Preparatory School in Watertown, and Michigan Lutheran Seminary in Saginaw -- 1000 who have indicated their willingness to be trained as an “Elisha” by enrolling in schools where the primary purpose is to train men and women for full-time service to the Lord. My question, my challenge for us today is how are we going to search for their replacements? What can we do to find shoulders capable of wearing the cloak of service to the Lord? How can we search for Elisha? You have more influence than you think. And I thought of this when I was at my grandpa’s funeral on Tuesday. As I greeted the people, I walked a sweet lady by the name of Dorothy. Dorothy is probably in her 80s now and she and her husband, Dan, were friends with my grandparents. Dorothy and Dan have a son who is a pastor and I remember Dorothy always encouraging my brother and I to go into the ministry. Now she wasn’t the only influence, she wasn’t even close to being the most influential person in my life, but she did make a difference. In her own way, she was searching for an Elisha. So look around – who are the young men here that could use your word of encouragement to serve their Lord as a pastor? But let’s not just think about full-time servants. Who’s the young girl in our congregation whom you can encourage to be a Sunday School teacher? Who’s the teenager that you can train to be the next elder or congregational president? And it doesn’t even have to be young people. Who’s the retired person that you can encourage to begin a visitation ministry and pay a friendly visit to some of our members who are alone? The funny thing is, as you search for that Elisha, sometimes you find yourself.

Brothers and sisters, our synod suggested this date as ministerial recruitment Sunday – particularly thinking about future pastors and teachers. That certainly is worth promoting – but ministry is not just guys who wear robes and stand in front of church. Ministry is service – ministry is something we all do. And so I encourage you today, ask yourself, “How can I serve the Lord? How can I carry out my personal ministry?” Then also ask, “How can I search for others to serve? How can I search for Elisha?” As you do that, based on what we read today, trust that God will provide such a messenger. But even be more thankful that God provides a message – a message of how Jesus served us with his life and with his death. AMEN.

