

Pentecost 11A – A Cave, a Wave, a Save
1 Kings 19:9-18; Matthew 14:22-33
St. John's Lutheran Church, Eau Claire, 13 Aug 2023
By Rev. Sandee D. Kosmo



SLIDE 1 -- SERMON TITLE

Grace to you and peace...

We all know some good stories about walking on water. Perhaps you've heard these:

Three people are in a boat. One of them is disliked by the other two. One of the two laments her forgetting her lunch, so the disliked one offers to go back to shore and get it. From the boat, she steps onto the water and walks across the lake toward land. One of the two in the boat complains, *"Look at that! She can't swim."*

OR

Another version: When she is walking across the lake, one of them tried to follow her. But with the first step on the water, he goes under. Emerging with gasps for air, he asks, *"What happened?"* The other guy says, *"She knows where the stones are."*



SLIDE 2 – STONES IN WATER

So we relate to Peter--Peter that great disciple and his perilous walk on the water. He trusts in God until things aren't going well. Or, envision this from our first lesson: The great prophet Elijah, trembling and hiding in a cave. How pathetic, if not humorous. The two stories offer us something about God and how we respond. Peter and Elijah model our first response. **PANIC!**

Do we know where the stones are when we dip our feet into the big rollers of life? When we step out into this world, what holds us up and keeps us afloat? What is the rock, the boulder of our faith?

We all know the humanness of Elijah hiding in a cave, Peter in Peril on a sea wave. Both the Elijah encounter with God and the Peter Peril with Jesus at sea are about faith and knowing God is there for us when stuff happens, not when God causes stuff. God's is not the cause; he's the happy SAVE when our faith flounders in dark places of life we all go, in unrelenting storms we all encounter.



SLIDE 3 – BUTTERFLY COCOON

Let's enter Elijah's dark and dinghy cave. He has taken refuge from King Ahab's wrath. God was presumed to be on a mountain in the Old Testament. So what is better than a mountain cave to escape our life-threatening fears? Elijah and this cave have significance. God entered our world by birthing in a cave in Bethlehem, yes, a cave, not a wooden structure like we see in modern nativity scenes. God in Jesus entered our world via a cave and left via a burial cave, a place of birthing and rebirthing like a butterfly's cocoon. From darkness to transformation. The cave experience!

Earthly Elijah went to what his people presumed was that God place to hide from the travails of life. God of the Older Testament was said to come to mountains in three ways:



SLIDE 4 – WIND – EARTHQUAKE -FIRE

By wind, by earthquake and by fire. Since the false God Baal came in those ways early on, so the Hebrew God was expected in the same way.

Poor, pitiful Elijah, the great prophet.

The real God, his God, did not come to him in the wind.

The real God, his God, did not come in the earthquake;
nor did the real God, his and our God, come in the fire.

They are all creations of God's hand but sans God this time.

This time that almighty, powerful God came in **a still small voice.**



SLIDE 5 -- CRUSHING SILENCE

God made a grand entry in the silence and calm of the aftermath. The breathtaking sound of silence...and many centuries before Simon and Garfunkel made the 1 King's God popular in the sound of silence—**crushing** silence as the Hebrew language translates it. **Crushing** silence.

Pathetic Elijah, the once great prophet, is reduced to a tiny, burrowing mouse hiding in the corner of the cave--looking for God in all the wrong places.

While hiding in that mountain cave—dark, hopeless, small, no exit but the way Elijah came in, God comes. God asks the once great prophet what he is doing in the fetal position in a cave while there is ministry to be done. Haven't we all been there—in our own caves of despair—abandoning God's work in this world?

See if you can relate to this:



SLIDE 6 -- CAVE

First Elijah the mighty OT prophet, rattles off the “Poor Pitiful Pearl” story about being the only one left to do his dissolving ministry—to do the job. Elijah is despondent. He thinks he is all alone and deserted by the world. God surrounds Elijah with love, lifts his burden by telling him to pass his mantle – pass that baton to Elisha, his understudy. It's his CAVE experience in more ways than one. God is there for Elijah, brings him down from the mountain cave of false refuge, and restores Elijah with unconditional love.

Fast forward: We leave the pathetic, dark cave for a disastrous sea wave adventure. This time a group of rowdy fishers, Jesus' disciples, are on the Sea of Galilee. What's to fear? Faithful Peter is in the boat. The boat, as we know, symbolizes the Christian Church and Peter as the Rock, the head of the church. Well, one of those storms in life abruptly changes the calm fishing expedition. Life seems in peril. Peter, the rock, the metamorphic rock matches Elijah's cave bravery—that of a mouse. Not in a cave this time, but fending off a big Kahuna rocking that boat.



SLIDE 7 – BLANK (BLUE)

Peter has not heard the quote: ***“Life is not about waiting for the storm to pass. It is learning to dance in the rain.”*** As with Elijah, Peter is frozen with fear. Both these pillars of faith, a mighty prophet and a top disciple, tell us we are all prone to be frozen with fear. Our faith fades briefly.

That brings us from a **cave**, through a **wave**, to God acting in this world to **save**. Jesus and his **save**, like baseball relief pitchers who come in during the final inning to save the narrow win! The narrow survival.

I remember a church where I served after leaving St. John’s. Two families were grieving for different reasons. One family’s member, after a few drinks, got behind the wheel of his Chevy Suburban and struck a beautiful 14-year-old girl from the congregation I was serving. She and her brother had been riding bikes on the paved shoulder of a road in that town. Her brother escaped, but saw his sister struck dead. So a second family was devastated by unfathomable grief.



SLIDE 8 – BAD IS...

There’s a Danish expression: ***“Bad is never good until worse happens.”*** It is hard enough when someone young dies. And, yes, there are people who do not know better, who can make situations worse.

At the difficult funeral home visitation a non-member Pentecostal woman stood outside and felt it her duty to warn everyone that the devil got this young girl. When I arrived, the family begged me to tell the woman to go away. I went back out to remove her and the additional pain she was adding. When I went to where she had been, the devil lady must have heard God’s sound of crushing silence. She had fled with self-righteous pitch forked tongue. Someone said she saw me coming, and gave up when I arrived. Didn’t know I had that kind of power!

Meanwhile, the mother, brother, grandparents, and many young classmates wanted to hear the sound of silence and kindness. The sad scenario was like the group that protests military funerals. The tragedy needs no one making it worse.

Actually, I had hoped to encounter that protesting woman so I could pass on:



SLIDE 9 – SO IT IS NOT THE WILL

Matthew 18:14: ***“So it is NOT the WILL of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones should be lost.”*** In other words, stuff happens, not devil doings at all. The old version of the Lord’s prayer may have incited this woman. You know the old part... “lead us not into temptation.” God doesn’t lead any of us into temptation and the original NT Greek does not say that. That’s why the Lord’s Prayer was retranslated correctly into our new version, “Save us from the time of trial.” But there are still those who think the devil takes hold of us to cause all ills—that the only answer is to hide in a cave, or let the sea wave overtake us in our sorrow.



SLIDE 10 – GOD IS INTO SAVING

If you remember nothing else from this sermon, remember this:
God is into saving, not calling up the devil.

It was not God’s will to gain an angel. GOD WILLS A FULL LIFE FOR EACH OF US. The world is full of tragic accidents and our own bumbings—drunken driving killing someone. God helps us come to forgiveness of bad choices in this world.

God cries, mourns, and surrounds us with unconditional loves love as God calls us to do in this world. Jesus embraces us in our waning faith—appears in the sound of silence; controls nature by walking on waves to our life boat.

It happened to lonely Elijah in a still small voice in a mountain cave; it happened to Peter in his momentary fear of abandonment. It happens to us.

God is not confined to sacred places we make like mountain tops, or water. God seeks us out in the silence. All places are holy. God is always with us wherever we hide or run into sea billows overwhelming us.

What we discover in the aftermath of trying to find God in all the wrong places or trying to bring the devil into play, is God’s saving grace. We discover faith in the

aftermath of the storm. We often re-discover our faith in reflection, in calling out.
“Jesus, Save me.” That trust in our Savior restored.



SLIDE 11 – FAITH, LOVE, PEACE

His love in a cave, on a wave, or wherever we turn in fear, restores us.
Feel that great Spirit abiding with and in you today, every day to save you.

You possess the stepping stones for your journey—faith, love, and peace.

Amen.

May the peace...