

Present Powerful Peace

Is anyone surprised that Peter and the boys fall down in repentant fear when they realize that they are in the presence of almighty God? It's kind of difficult to ignore when your boat is sinking beneath your feet under the weight of the largest miraculous catch of fish you've ever seen in your life. Is anyone surprised that Peter and the boys left **EVERYTHING** sitting on the shore and immediately began to follow Jesus? After witnessing such a powerful miracle, *how could you not?!* Well... not so fast.

Remember that Elijah had just finished triumphing over 450 prophets of Baal in a huge **God vs. Baal showdown**; an all-consuming, fire-from-heaven display that made abundantly clear that God was completely in charge and Lord of all. Unfortunately, though, even after such a **HUGE** display of power and might, some people *still* refused to believe. That powerful miracle didn't change a thing for some folks. In fact, wicked queen Jezebel sent word to Elijah, letting him know that by the same time tomorrow he would suffer the same deadly fate as those 450 Baal prophets he had just slaughtered. If something as powerful and miraculous as all-consuming fire from heaven and the subsequent slaughter of 450 false prophets won't convince people to turn from their evil and turn back to God, then what hope does he have for any kind of evangelistic success in this foul and wicked place? This is why Elijah tucks tail in sorrow and fear, and heads for the hills, eventually hiding in the cave. This is why Elijah cries out to God and asks that God just end it now and kill him. *"I quit. I can't win. Just put an end to my miserable life. Take me home to heaven."*

But you know the rest of this story. It's when Elijah finally settles down in his little cave hiding spot that the very Word of God Himself—**preincarnate Christ**—comes to Elijah and asks him, *"Elijah, what are you doing here? Why are you here?"* Basically, *"why are you not where I've called you to be, doing what I've called you to do?"* God frames this question in such a way so that Elijah might repent. But Elijah didn't repent. **He wasn't sorry for running away.** When things didn't go the way he had planned or thought they should go, he lost it. *"God, I've been very jealous for You. I've been an outstanding and faithful Christian, and yet it's been to no avail. Israel has rejected me and rejected You. They've torn down the altars and killed all your faithful prophets and are now worshipping false gods. Now they want to kill me. There's no hope for these people! There's no point!"*

This is when God tells Elijah to go stand outside on top of the mountain so that God can show him something. By means of mighty miracles and terrifying displays of power, God teaches Elijah a lesson about Himself and how He works. God very clearly demonstrates that He's **not** in the mighty things that man looks to.

He's *not* in the mighty rock-shattering winds. He's *not* in the terrifying earthquake. He's *not* in the fire. ***God wasn't in any of those HUGE and awe-inspiring, terrifying things.*** Instead, God whispers to Elijah in the faintest, lowest little whisper; that tiny little whisper coming from inside the very cave that Elijah had just left. Elijah has to move back to the entrance of the cave in order to hear. How's that for "*I am with you always*"? "*I've been here all along. You're the one who has left!*"

Now, I know we understand what God is telling Elijah, but do we understand it in our own lives? Might we miss the almighty presence and peace of God because we're too busy looking for the mighty and miraculous instead of the lowly whispers ***already*** in our midst? You may not want to admit it, but it's very easy to become weak in the faith when things aren't going as great as we think they should. We always seem to need a sign/proof from God. His Word and Promise is ***never quite good enough*** for us. You may not want to admit it, but that doesn't make it any less true.

Might we miss the almighty presence and peace of God because we're too caught up in all the fright and terror all around us, too busy ***fleeing from Him in fear?*** I realize that fear is a great motivator, and God does sometimes use frightening things to get us turned around and running back to Him. Sometimes that's the only way He can get our attention. ***It's sad, but when things are good, God is rarely ever noticed or acknowledged, but when things go south, God tends to get our full attention, doesn't He?*** Fear can be a **great** motivator for repentance. However, you know as well as I do that motivation driven by fear is often very short-lived. One example: Remember how full churches were the day after September 11th? Remember how empty those same churches were by Christmas time? It didn't last, did it?

There's also the reality that that which terrifies us may not drive us back to God, ***but actually further away from Him.*** Just consider how 2020 has played out thus far. Look around at this crazy, chaotic world—this "Christian nation"—we live in. ***I understand why Elijah would feel so defeated and disillusioned.*** It seems that the Word of God is having no appreciable effect anymore. For all intents and purposes, it looks like Christianity is losing the fight. Sin runs rampant. It's even celebrated and promoted by many who still dare to call themselves "Christian," much the same as wicked Queen Jezebel did. You would think that even some of this would be enough to scare people straight and get them turned around and running to God. You would think. I keep hearing that all this has somehow brought us closer to God. Perhaps this is true for a few. After all, many of you are now looking at Holy Communion in a whole new light, aren't you? Here really and truly is Christ Jesus (just like He says), and where the Lord of Life gives us His very Body and Blood, He cannot at the same time give us corruption

and death. We know that, but it seems to register now more than ever, doesn't it? I pray that this blessed, faithful understanding never fades and grows tired.

And yet...let's face it: Look around. Nothing has really changed. In many ways, it's only gotten worse. All this craziness and fear in our daily lives, and it hasn't really drawn most people closer to God. In many cases, it's only driven them *further away*. People flock to the lake, to the gun shop, to their sanitized bunker, to their favorite re-opened restaurant. They flock to social media while never getting out of their pajamas. They flee to the words of talking-head "experts," which seem to change every day. They flee to false prophets, who are just one click away, who pour sweet honey in their ears and give them chicken soup for the soul, *but never give them the Bread of Life and the Living Water that is Christ*. Look around. Very few seem to be flocking to God's Word in the midst of all this craziness. **Very few flock to be in the presence of God.** They are all torn up—clinically depressed—that they can't buy a \$12 beer and \$10 hot dog at a ball game, but it doesn't even faze them that they haven't had the Body and Blood of Christ in months (or years). I understand Elijah's despair.

What about you? It's easy to point the finger at all "those hypocrites." What about you? Would the exercise of your faith in this fallen and sinful world be somehow different if God just gave you some kind of powerful miracle or display? Do you need a sign/proof *before* you will fully commit to trusting in Him? Folks: You want a sign/proof of God's love for you? ***Look no further than this cross!*** Here is where the sun went black, the mountains quaked and split, the huge temple curtain was torn in two, and tombs burst open and dead people actually came back to life and went into town! Here is where God in the flesh died! ***Here in the midst of all this terrifying tragedy and tribulation is the love that God has for you, on full display for all the world to see!*** And think about that for a moment. Here [*the crucifix*] is almighty God in the flesh, right? This is the **LAST** place you'd look for the Almighty! Yet here He is! And yet...at the same time, ***God wasn't here***...and thank God He wasn't. "*My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?*" The Son of God was abandoned by His God and Father on this bloody cross in your place—if only for an instant—all so that you would **never** be abandoned or forsaken or forgotten. Here is God...and here wasn't God...for you. ***O, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of the God of our salvation!***

Folks: Where does God call you to be? What does He call you to do, in good times as well as in bad times, richer, poorer, in sickness and in health? Maybe the better question is: ***Where do you flee when the trials and tribulations hit?*** Does God ever have to tap you on the shoulder and say, "*What are you doing here?*" Look to the font, the altar, the pulpit, and the lectern. Here is this same almighty God, who conquered sin, death, and the devil, in the ***lowest, simplest, and most unexpected, over-looked places*** (kinda like almighty God in a fishing boat

with a couple of lowly fishermen). ***Here is where your God and Lord is!*** He's right where He calls you to be! He's right where He Himself promises to be. He's right where He points you and directs you; ***He drawing near to you in order that you would draw near unto Him.*** Wars, rumors of war, plagues, fears of getting sick... none of that has ever kept God from His people.

Now, we may not understand how this mystery of the Trinity works, but through faith in His Word and Promise, we do understand that this triune God is working for us and our salvation in/through these means of grace. He's "hiding" in plain sight. Ordinary and unassuming words. Ordinary men; nothing special. Ordinary water. Ordinary little morsels of bread and wine. By all worldly standards ***so puny, so seemingly ineffective...so "not enough."*** Faith sees and hears differently though. *"I am with you always. Take and eat; take and drink. This is My body. This is My blood, given and shed for you for your forgiveness, for your assurance, for your peace that surpasses all understanding."* Folks: You're **not** going to get this anywhere else! Where the Word is rightly taught and the Sacraments rightly administered, **there is Christ.** Here is where He continually holds out to you His free gifts of mercy, grace, and peace.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ: Here is this blessed Immanuel Truth, graciously fulfilled and present even now in your midst....for you. May this real presence and peace of Christ be your desire, your assurance, and your peace all your remaining days and into all eternity.

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit... **AMEN**