



## BIBLE STUDIES THAT WORK

**Pentecost 2 - Proper 7 (C)**  
**June 23, 2019**

**[RCL] 1 Kings 19:1-4, (5-7), 8-15a; Psalm 42 and 43; Galatians 3:23-29; Luke 8:26-39**

### **1 Kings 19:1-4 (5-7) 8-15a**

Elijah has been very busy doing the work of a prophet, but it seems like his fortunes have changed. He is exhausted and one can imagine that he feels alone, isolated, and no longer favored by God. God's response to his moment of weakness and despair is to send an angel to tend to both his physical needs with cake and water and his emotional and spiritual needs with encouragement. This tells us something about the fundamental nature of God: God meets us where we are in our moments of dire need and is present in those needs and meets those needs.

Elijah now has the strength to travel the long distance to Mt. Sinai, also known as Horeb. There is an echo of the journey of the Israelites through the wilderness and Moses' encounter with God at Mt. Sinai, signaling that Elijah has the opportunity to encounter God. We can assume that this angel has helped Elijah to recover physically and spiritually to prepare for this encounter. He is removed from the danger of the evil powers of the world and can now encounter God. But this is a relationship of mutuality, as well. Elijah has been delivered from his fear, despair, and helplessness, but what is offered by God is not simply given. Elijah must still discern that God is found in the simple silence, the antithesis of the power shown in the wind, the earthquake, and the fire. It is easy to hear this passage for the miracle that it is, but the profound truth is that what God invited Elijah into was a deeper relationship of love than what propelled him to the glory of his victory over the prophets of Baal. Now he experiences God in a much more intimate way and is prepared to pass on his mantle to Elisha. God offers this deeper relationship that is more than just restoring Elijah physically or even emotionally—it is personal transformation.

- Describe a time that you felt God's presence. Was it in silence or in some other way? How did you know it was God?

### **Psalm 42 and 43**

How often have our souls longed for God because of the trials of our lives? The writer of this powerful poem of lament evokes those feelings that we all have had – or will experience in the future – of loss and longing. In those times, when we are faced with despair and sorrow or when the darkness surrounding our souls is so thick, following the writer's command to trust in God and give thanks can seem like an impossible task. One of the beautiful elements of these psalms is that the writer acknowledges those

moments of darkness for what they are. We can take solace in knowing that we are not alone in those feelings and that God is there in those moments as well.

These psalms, which really are one single poem, invite us to see hope and restoration by trusting in God that the very acts of worship and giving thanks to God will result in that restoration. When there are times when that seems to be too much and the heaviness of the soul seems too great a weight to bear, we can take heart that the strength of God that we experience is through relationship. Our relationship with God is not contingent upon our own actions or even generating our own sense of hope. God dwells in that space of darkness too and will be present with us even when all hope seems lost. From that place, we can worship God through our longing and experience that strength and renewal.

- What does “heaviness of the soul” mean to you? Do you feel God in that feeling?
- Describe a time when you have experienced a sense of separation from God. Did something change to help you feel closer to God?

### **Galatians 3:23-29**

Paul’s letter to the Galatians is a powerful message to Gentile Christians that adherence to the law is not a requirement for faith in Christ. We hear one of the most profound points in that argument here which literally upends the social fabric of our temporal world and provides a frame of reference for us to understand what baptism really means as life through the death of Jesus. All are one in Christ, all are equal in Christ, and all of the ways that we differentiate ourselves from others are meaningless in Christ.

This is a powerful message that can be a beacon for what we strive for as Christians, but it can also be a source of fear and challenge to the established powers of the world, thus echoing Jesus’ earthly ministry. For the Church, it serves as a guidepost for how we approach the world and how we assess ourselves. In all, this passage points to the future that we hope for in Christ and it helps to guide us towards how we can live into that future now through our own actions, both individually and communally.

- Paul lays out several divisions in his world (Jew/Greek, slave/free, male/female). Name three similar divisions from our world that would correlate to Paul’s.
- We all strive to view and embody the life in Christ that Paul describes, but it is difficult. Where have you or your faith community fallen short, and what would be an effective way to address these shortcomings?

### **Luke 8:26-39**

The fact that this story centers around a man controlled by demons can be a challenging issue for modern readers. The text has enough detail to make it very approachable for us, and it appears in the gospels written by Mark and Matthew, which suggests that it was widely circulated in the early Christian communities. All of this makes it very difficult to dismiss it outright as fantasy. If we set aside our own notions of what a demon is and focus on the man himself, we see someone who is cut off from his family and community, who has to be chained up in a place no one else will go for everyone’s safety, and who

lives out his existence in horrendous conditions. While we may not use the term demon in the same way, we still have individuals who live like this today. Jesus not only heals this man physically and spiritually, but also teaches him and sends him back to his family to proclaim the message of the gospel! This provides tremendous hope for us on what a deeper relationship with Jesus means, but it is also a look at what the forthcoming kingdom of God will look like where the evil that crushes us physically and spiritually is defeated by the love and power of God and where our broken relationships are healed and restored. In the moment of our greatest need, Jesus will be there ready to meet us and heal us where we are.

- Have you ever experienced something that you could describe as a “demon”? Was your faith helpful in dealing with it?
- This man showed tremendous gratitude to Jesus by sitting at his feet and asking to become his disciple. Describe a time that you felt gratitude. What happened and how did you respond to that feeling?

*The Rev. Patrick Burke is a newly ordained priest in the Diocese of Indianapolis and recently completed a Master of Divinity degree at Bexley Seabury Seminary in Chicago. Patrick served for two years as a seminary intern at All Saints Episcopal Church in Indianapolis and currently serves as curate at Good Samaritan Episcopal Church in Brownsburg, Indiana, focusing on community engagement and building innovative faith communities. Patrick lives in Fishers, Indiana, with Cheryl, his wife of eighteen years, daughter Alexis, and their dog Fezzik.*