
READ: 1 Kings 18:20-39

²⁰So Ahab sent to all the Israelites, and assembled the prophets at Mount Carmel.

²¹Elijah then came near to all the people, and said, "How long will you go limping with two different opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him." The people did not answer him a word. ²²Then Elijah said to the people, "I, even I only, am left a prophet of the Lord; but Baal's prophets number four hundred fifty. ²³Let two bulls be given to us; let them choose one bull for themselves, cut it in pieces, and lay it on the wood, but put no fire to it; I will prepare the other bull and lay it on the wood, but put no fire to it. ²⁴Then you call on the name of your god and I will call on the name of the Lord; the god who answers by fire is indeed God." All the people answered, "Well spoken!" ²⁵Then Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, "Choose for yourselves one bull and prepare it first, for you are many; then call on the name of your god, but put no fire to it."

²⁶So they took the bull that was given them, prepared it, and called on the name of Baal from morning until noon, crying, "O Baal, answer us!" But there was no voice, and no answer. They limped about the altar that they had made. ²⁷At noon Elijah mocked them, saying, "Cry aloud! Surely he is a god; either he is meditating, or he has wandered away, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened." ²⁸Then they cried aloud and, as was their custom, they cut themselves with swords and lances until the blood gushed out over them. ²⁹As midday passed, they raved on until the time of the

offering of the oblation, but there was no voice, no answer, and no response. ³⁰Then Elijah said to all the people, "Come closer to me"; and all the people came closer to him. First he repaired the altar of the Lord that had been thrown down; ³¹Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of the Lord came, saying, "Israel shall be your name"; ³²with the stones he built an altar in the name of the Lord. Then he made a trench around the altar, large enough to contain two measures of seed. ³³Next he put the wood in order, cut the bull in pieces, and laid it on the wood. He said, "Fill four jars with water and pour it on the burnt offering and on the wood." ³⁴Then he said, "Do it a second time"; and they did it a second time. Again he said, "Do it a third time"; and they did it a third time, ³⁵so that the water ran all around the altar, and filled the trench also with water. ³⁶At the time of the offering of the oblation, the prophet Elijah came near and said, "O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that you are God in Israel, that I am your servant, and that I have done all these things at your bidding. ³⁷Answer me, O Lord, answer me, so that this people may know that you, O Lord, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back." ³⁸Then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt offering, the wood, the stones, and the dust, and even licked up the water that was in the trench. ³⁹When all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, "The Lord indeed is God; the Lord indeed is God."

REFLECT & DISCUSS

Context & Review

The movement from loneliness to solitude (self) and from hostility to hospitality (others) are linked to the core movement from illusion to prayer. Our relationship to God impacts how we relate to ourselves and to others. And solitude and hospitality are visible signs of prayer.

Quotes

“There are only two tragedies in life: one is not getting what one wants, and the other is getting it.” - *Oscar Wilde*

“Prayer is not introspection... prayer asks us to break out of our monologue with ourselves and to imitate Jesus by turning our lives into an unceasing conversation with the One we call God...”

- *Henri Nouwen*

Big Idea

Prayer is not prayer if we remain unchanged.

Reflect

1. Read the scripture passage carefully and slowly. What word or image stands out to you? Why?
2. How does this story challenge you? How might this story speak to our contemporary situation or into your personal life?
3. What is prayer? What role does it have in your life? How can it grow community and deepen relationship?
4. What are “illusions” or idols we often chase--personally or as a society? How might prayer break us of these?

Engage

Ideas to ignite or deepen prayer:

1. **Walk a prayer labyrinth** - follow a winding singular path to a center point. Walking the way prayerfully can reflect the journey inward, encountering God in the center, and emerging changed. Labyrinths can be walked alone or with a group. Local, outdoor Labyrinths can be found at:
 - a. Christ Church Cathedral
 - b. Bluegrass United Church of Christ.
2. **Calendar** - mark a daily or weekly time on your calendar (and set an alert to your phone or computer). Stop, wherever you are, and pray routinely at this time.
3. **The Jesus Prayer** - “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy upon me” is a core prayer of Hysachasm, a spiritual tradition reaching back to the 5th century. It is a powerful summary of all prayer, and praying it repeatedly, routinely, meditatively, invites the prayer to move from our heads to our heart. Eventually, we may cease praying the prayer, and the prayer may begin to pray us.
4. **The Lord’s Prayer** - invite friends or your family to pray this prayer together routinely. Try sharing it with others before meals, small group gatherings, bedtime, or to begin a weekly family sabbath.

Listen Online

Sermon audio available at southelkhorncc.org/sermons