

## Sermon on 1<sup>st</sup> Kings 19, 3-13

Pastor Mareile Glaubitz, 16<sup>th</sup> February 2014

Dear congregation!

As you have heard I have chosen part of Elijah's story for today's sermon. This is, because I like prophet Elijah very much. I even named my firstborn son Elia.

Elijah's story is a passionate one, it is full of extremes. At first he was powerful, he could pray to God and perform miracles and great deeds! Just before the story we've heard as the scripture reading, Elijah returned as a hero from mount Karmel, where he had defeated the prophets of Baal. A moment later, he is a nervous wreck, his power has gone completely. His former success doesn't count anymore. And there is no family, there are no friends who would comfort him or help him. Not even God seems to support him. No, Elijah is alone and frightened. He runs for his life, hunted like prey, and wants to die.

Poor Elijah. Being a prophet is a burden. Elijah is not the first prophet who rather wants to be dead than to fulfill his tasks. However God doesn't accept defeat. He urges his prophet to continue by sending an angel.

After running aimlessly back and forth the dusty hills of the desert, Elijah reaches mount Sinai. Long time ago Moses had been there. Moses the friend of God, the most important, incomparable prophet

- he had climbed the mountain and stood on top, covered in a cloud, talking to the Almighty himself. On top of the mountain he had received the 10 commandments and when he came back his face was shining bright. Elijah however hides himself in a cave, looking for shelter in a cold night. Elijah tries to relate himself to that place where God had given his covenant, tries to find something to hold on. Sitting in the silence and darkness of the cave Elijah is thinking of his fundamental beliefs.

"The Lord is my God" that is the most fundamental one. It is part of his identity; it is even the meaning of his name: Elijah – the Lord is my God. Elijah is very sure about that. He knows that he is serving the only true God. He might often be alone, because many people don't understand his determination. But at least he knows that he is right. And God knows he is right. So God will protect him and reveal his power, won't he?

Outside the cave a storm springs up. The wind is howling. Rocks fall off and hit the ground, making clanking and crashing sounds. But the storm doesn't show the power of God. There is no God in the storm. Despite tradition. God is not there.

Elijah is angry. Angry because God is absent. Angry because of his enemies, who make his life so difficult. Angry, because too many people don't care about the true God. Elijah is fed up. God should take action, Elijah thinks. God should be tougher. He should show

everybody that he is the Lord, and that his will is to be done. He should make the world a better place. He should stop all wars. He should make it impossible for human beings to torture other human beings. There are lots of ideas what God could do. While Elijah is thinking the floor is shaking. Once and again. The earth is quaking. Elijah thinks: Now, God finally come to judge the world. But he doesn't. There is great noise but no God. Elijah's faith is shattered.

Now, Elijah has nothing to lose. He listens to the crackling sound of burning fire and is calm. He doesn't look for God anymore. Elijah realizes how insignificant he is. He senses that he hasn't been right always. He has expected too much from this little life. All his efforts to serve God – meaningless. And God? Well, God is different than people think. He is unknown to man. Even his prophet doesn't know him.

In this moment of shattered faith a soft whisper of wind begins to blow. Elijah is surprised. The wind is speaking to him softly. God is there. Elijah leaves his cave; he turns to that voice, to God. Outside God tells him: "You are not alone, Elijah. There are others who believe in me. I will keep them. I will keep you. Go back, I need you."

So, dear congregation, the story of Elijah and God takes a good turn. In the end Elijah regards himself again as God's prophet. His identity is restored. Elijah fulfills his new tasks and is taken up to heaven – accompanied by fire and a stormy wind!

That's Elijah's story. It is not ours. Our stories with God might not be as spectacular as Elijah's. Even though, we as well experience that God is different to what we have come to believe of him. He is God. We don't have the ability to understand him completely. Our faith can be shattered easily. That is nothing to be ashamed of. As human beings we can't have faith as a possession. We can't put our experiences with God in beautiful words and hope that God will fit in and act according to our mind. God will always be smaller and bigger, higher and lower and different.

So, as a consequence, we can't expect ourselves to feel close to God every day. To my mind feeling far away from God or being unsure of him is part of faith as well. And I admit that I get nervous when people emphasize the personal relationship to God, to Jesus and try to find proof of their being right and pious every day.

I like what Dag Hammarskjöld, UN Secretary-General, once said: "Faith is God's unification with a soul in a dark night. This unification happens when all friends are sleeping and God remains silent." The dark night is for God still an opportunity to speak, using his soft whispering voice. A voice a human being can hear only when he or she has given up the desire to be strong and right, confident and pious. The dark night has great potential. It might be a moment for God to reach out to a poor soul.

So, Elijah's story teaches us, that God reveals himself in moments of shattered faith surprisingly and new. Whispering softly as a soothing wind. In a moment of darkness God is still there. Abraham, Moses, Elijah, Jesus and others have heard the voice of God in their despair, and they lived. It is good for us to remember their stories, to borrow some of their faith when ours has been shattered and to nourish our longing for God.

Amen