Text; 1 Kings 19:9-21

**Introduction**

I’m going to steal something I heard at the District Convention this week. Sorry John Burrey, you’ve heard the core of this already. But I feel like it fits our texts and our situation today. And it preaches.

**Text**

You’ve probably heard me say before that I’ve got a few bones to pick with the lectionary. One of them is it tends to skip or trim around hard texts. Although that one is hit or miss and we preachers often conspire with it. When a tough text does appear, we ignore it and pick up an easier one. But the lectionary is consistent is skipping marital texts – texts with action or violence in them. And this is a perfect example. You don’t get our Old Testament lesson, without the confrontation immediately before it. That use to be a Sunday School staple. The kinds loved the jokes – “Maybe your God is on the toilet!” – and the fire from heaven. They loved the taunts – “pour some water on the altar and the offering, no more, drench it.” And the boys would leave the lesson chasing the prophets of Baal – “And Elijah said to them, "Seize the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape." And they seized them. And Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon and slaughtered them there. (1 Ki. 18:40 ESV)”

What is God doing? “When all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, "The LORD, he is God; the LORD, he is God." (1 Ki. 18:39 ESV) He was making himself known. He was doing what he promised to do.

And for some reason, active cranky Elijah against the prophets of Baal is missing from the lectionary. There are plenty of lectionary stories of patient endurance and bearing up under suffering. There are none about ceasing what God is doing.

And you don’t get our text today without that preceding scene of victory. Because I have know idea how you have just witnessed the fire from Heaven and killed 450 prophets of Baal, and immediately end up a sad sack in the desert. Or at least it never made complete sense. But then I started thinking a bit. Yes, 450 prophets of Baal are dead, but Jezebel is still queen and Ahab is still king. And they will just ordain more priests of Baal. There always seem to be an unlimited supply of false priests and prophets. Yes, the people who saw it confessed God. But the entire nation didn’t see it. And we know how this things go. Word will spread and people won’t believe it. And they will just continue believing what they want to believe. Some of those people won’t care because they will just blame God for the draught. If YHWH is God, and he’s the one who brought the drought, that isn’t good news. Why would he do this to us. Kinda like the joke about all modern atheists – “God doesn’t exists, and boy do I hate him.”

Nothing ever seems to really change. God can do something – make fire come down from heaven – and nothing changes. God can send his son who works signs and wonders – and the crowds are always fickle. We always like our personal sins. And you’d be surprised at how fast signs and wonders didn’t happen.

I think that is a bit of how you get to where we pick up Elijah. “The Word of the LORD came to Elijah and said to him, ‘What are you doing here?’ And He answered, ‘I have been very jealous for the LORD – and all that is going to happen is the entire world now hates me and is going to kill me.”

Let me paraphrase that a bit. Why is it this way? Why can this great sing be done, yet the people of Israel forsake your covenant? Why do they ignore and throw down your altars? Why do you allow your prophets to be slaughtered constantly? Those 450 were a drop in the bucket compared to yours, why? And Why am I so alone? “Even I only am left.” Why have you abandoned me?

Even though we might witness what God is doing. Even though we have seen his work. We end up asking Why?

And the truth is that God just doesn’t answer why all that often. It isn’t an important question.

**Christology**

Because what God desires is faith. Faith in what he has done. Faith in what he promises to do. The whys belong to God and are his forever. You, go behold what God is doing. “Go out and stand on the mountain before the LORD.”

And the LORD passes by. The LORD is always passing by. God is active in this world. And what we really want God active in is impressive ways. A great and strong wind that rips up the mountains changing the very surface. An earthquake that brings down all those high. A fire that rips through society turning the hearts of men. We want the LORD passing by having loosed the fateful lightning of his terrible swift sword.

Jesus would say to the crowds they came because they had their fill of bread. They wanted the miracles.

“But the LORD was not in the fire. After the fire the sound of a low whisper. And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak…”.

It is not that God can’t do those signs and wonders. He does. It’s that they have never changed hearts. It’s the Word that comes from outside of us that changes hearts. It’s the word that we encounter in the silence of the night when we are tired of asking why. It’s the Word that speaks low and directly to you. That you know you are on Holy Ground and cover your face lest you see what you can’t. It’s the word that against asks for your complaint – “What are you doing here Elijah?” And listens to the why’s one more time.

It’s the Word from the cross. Why have you forsaken me? And yet followed by Into your hands I commend my spirit. The whys weren’t foreign even to Jesus. But it was his faith that saves us. That something as low as a cross was how the Father would save all of his. That something as quiet as death, would be heard.

**Moral**

God doesn’t answer Elijah’s why’s. He points him to what. God is always passing by. “Go back Elijah and look closely. Look at what the Lord is doing. See it, take your part in it.”

Anoint Hazael and Jehu. Find Elisha. There are 7000 in Israel who have never bent the knee to Baal. Go back and see what the LORD is doing.

“So he departed…and found Elisha.”

The question isn’t really why does God allow this, or not do that. We don’t know. And God probably isn’t going to tell us. But God does pass by. He passes by real close. So close that you can hear the whisper. What is he saying to you? What is God doing that he’s inviting you to be part of?

Because that is what we are invited to do here. To be like Elisha. “He arose and went after Elijah and assisted him.” We are invited to follow Jesus knowing the cost. It’s the cross. What is God doing? You’ll find it in the small things. The things that change hearts one by one. They things that make us a new creation. The things that ask us to faith. There is no way I can do this. “You are right, God has already done it.” We just need to recognize the moment of his passing by. We need to walk by the Spirit.

**Eschatological**

And it is worth hearing Jesus tough note. When you hear that whisper. And you’ve returned. Don’t look back. This is a journey of faith. If you’ve got a case of the whys – lament is fine. Take it to God. You probably won’t get an answer, but you’ll get a direction. Look – there is what I’m doing. Be a part.

The life of faith is not something you can pick up and put down. “No one puts his hand to the plough an and looks back is fit for the Kingdom.” Here that. Nobody in the Bible who looked back ever has anything good happen to them.

Our walk is Heavenward all the way. Keep walking. God is working something in you.