

Sunday 9 August – Tenth Sunday after Trinity

Sermon by Christine Newmarch

An audio recording of the sermon from St Luke's will be available after the service at [Sermons \(tk-tiptree-braxted-benefice.org.uk\)](http://Sermons(tk-tiptree-braxted-benefice.org.uk)

Elijah was a Jewish prophet who lived around the 9th century before Christ. His ministry took place in the northern kingdom during the reigns of Kings Ahab, and Ahaziah.

Elijah faithfully defended the worship of the YHWH, challenging Ahab who had turned from away from God and was serving the Baals.

It had been hard work for him, and by the time of this morning's excerpt from his story, he was tired and despondent, feeling persecuted and in fear of his life.

Frightened by Jezebel's threats, he was on the run, and retreated into a cave on Mount Horeb, feeling sorry for himself. It was dark in the cave, and it seems dark within his soul.

Poor Elijah! However, God was not about to give up on him. God spoke, asking Elijah what he was doing there. Elijah responded with a grudging self-pitying account of all he had done to serve God.

God didn't engage in a conversation about the value of Elijah's service or his current predicament. Instead, he gave a simple instruction that Elijah should go out to the entrance of the cave as God was about to pass by. However, Elijah was too fed up to move.

Maybe we feel like this from time to time? Well, if so, God does not give up on us just as he did not give up on Elijah.

God put on a spectacular show for him: a great wind, strong enough to split mountains; then there was an earthquake; and next fire.

Elijah was unmoved. For all his misery he knew that he needed help, and would not find it in the violence of the wind, earthquake and fire, even though these are sometimes associated with God's presence.

It was only when Elijah heard the sound of sheer silence, something we rarely hear in this busy world, that he recognised God's presence. Then he

felt able to get up, wrap himself in his cloak, and went to the entrance of the cave. He found God in the silence.

God asked again what Elijah was doing there. Though he had the same story to tell, he was now in a different frame of mind, listening to God rather than despairing. In the moment that Elijah understood that he was really seen by God, he began to see himself differently too, and was empowered to take on further ministry for God.

God loves us all, and is deeply concerned about what we are doing at each point in our lives. Today, he asks us to consider where we are, where we are going, and what we are doing about our faith journeys.

Paul touches on this issue in his letter to the Romans. 'The word is near you' he tells them. It doesn't matter who we are, everyone who calls on the name of Jesus shall be saved, he wrote.

There is a clue to what we may be asked to do here as well. The salvation Paul writes about is not to be held tightly, exclusively for ourselves, but to be widely proclaimed. This is indeed a challenge, how are we to do this?

In my ministry, I have come to believe that all the weddings, funerals and baptisms the church gladly offers, not only proclaims Christ as our Saviour, but opens a space for the Holy Spirit to enter, and to turn the heart and soul of anyone in the church. We may not see the fruit, the good fruit, of the welcome we offer here, but the seed will grow elsewhere as people disperse.

Perhaps these thoughts might help you see all the other things which we do in the church in a different light?

However, if we feel battered by the storms of personal circumstances or loss, by the national and international news, by the climate emergency, we can trust in Jesus, that when we are overcome with despair, he will come to greet us and save us. Out of storm, Jesus said: 'Take heart, it is I!'

I am so pleased we shall be singing the hymn 'Dear Lord and Father of mankind' in a few moments. It is a wonderful hymn which speaks to many people. Parry's elegant music seems to carry the words effortlessly:

- Our need for forgiveness and desire to serve;
- A recognition of our need for simple, uncomplicated faith;

- The importance of setting aside the strain and stress which separate us from God's peace;
- and finally, a plea to find God not in earthquake wind or fire, but in his still, small voice of calm.

When we sing the hymn, let us pray every word and phase, carrying us back to the lesson Elijah learnt at Horeb. Then God will be with us to carry us forward through this life to the next.

Amen.