

June 6, 2010

1 Kings 17: 1, 7-24

“Going where God sends us”

“Birds of a feather flock together”. This old proverb highlights a human truth: People tend to hang around with other people they feel comfortable with. Usually these are people we perceive as being a lot like ourselves.

Remembering back to Pentecost- it’s like we “speak the same language”. We don’t have to struggle to communicate or risk the embarrassment of saying or doing something stupid. We LIKE our comfort zones.

I can trace this tendency through my own life. I avoided athletic kids because I WASN’T. I was uncomfortable with foreigners until I experienced BEING one. I felt awkward around boys. As a young adult I still gravitated towards women—hanging out in the kitchen at parties and so forth. I still catch myself doing these same things.

Why fight it? Why not just flock with the birds you “match”? Our faith teaches us this is not God’s PLAN; not God’s WILL; not God’s WAY.

Many Biblical stories reveal this truth. Our first lesson for today presents one of these. This is a story about the Old Testament prophet Elijah.

Elijah was a prophet, one who speaks for God, who lived in the Northern Kingdom of Israel during the ninth century before Christ. The Kingdom was ruled by Ahab, a Hebrew who married a Phoenician, a foreign princess named Jezebel.

Jezebel encouraged Ahab to give up worshipping the Hebrew God Yahweh (Jehovah) and to worship Phoenician gods instead. Ahab considered turning to Ba’al, the storm god, bringer of rain to water crops.

Elijah condemned this, warning the king that God (Yahweh) would stop all rain and bring a drought, thereby revealing his power is greater than Ba’al’s.

It happened as he foretold. Eventually Elijah himself experienced the widespread lack of food and water.

What did God do then? God sent Elijah into the territory of BA'AL. He sent Elijah to a Phoenician town, Zarephath. God sent Elijah to a poor widow with a young son. This woman and her child were at death's door, on the brink of starvation. God told Elijah, "Go to them, because I've arranged for them to feed and care for you."

DOES THIS MAKE ANY SENSE AT ALL????

- You are fighting with powerful rulers over their worship of idols
- And God wants you to go to a town where they ALL worship those idols
- To a starving woman and child
- So that you will be protected and nourished.

WHAT KIND OF WEIRD PLAN IS THIS?????

Elijah did it. He went where God sent him. And it worked out the way God said it would. Elijah was hidden, saved, protected and nourished back to health by these starving foreigners, just in time to heal the boy who fell gravely ill and stopped breathing.

What can we learn from this?

- God has a fondness for all kinds of birds flocking together
- People we see as helpless may be the ones God has chosen to help US
- We limit God's arena
- We think WE know best when and where we should bring God's good gifts
- We think WE know best who we will allow to help us, to be agents of God in our lives

THIS IS NOT OUR ASSIGNMENT.

GOD knows when and where we should go and bring his good news.

GOD chooses the one who will minister to us.

OUR JOB is to GO WHERE GOD SENDS US. Our job is to be ready to be surprised!

This is not a minor point in the Bible. The reading from Luke's gospel, about Jesus teaching in his home synagogue, reaffirms this truth. There he was in their holy place. Jesus had already begun his ministry. He had to know people in Nazareth had heard he was doing some amazing things.

Jesus surely knew they were hoping he might do something cool for them. They probably really wanted him to give his entire hometown some special status and importance.

Instead Jesus told them, “You know that story about God’s prophet Elijah? You know how there was a terrible drought? There were many widows in Israel at that time, many of them suffering terribly. But God didn’t send the prophet to any of them. Instead he sent him to a foreign widow, so she could help him, and he could help her.” After a few more words about how God, instead of healing a leper in Israel, healed an enemy foreign military commander instead, the people got mad. The Bible tells us they were “filled with rage”. They dragged Jesus outside and went to throw him over a cliff, but he miraculously “passed through the midst of them” and walked away.

God is not into the “birds of a feather flock together” approach to life. In fact, he works in opposition to that pattern much of the time.

If you are mostly hanging out with birds whose feathers match yours, it is possible you are not listening to God’s voice.

**GO WHERE GOD SENDS YOU.
RECEIVE BLESSINGS FROM OTHERS DIFFERENT FROM YOU.
OFFER BLESSINGS TO BIRDS WITH OTHER PLUMAGE.
BE PREPARED FOR THE UNEXPECTED.**

Take this challenge seriously. Study your June calendar this week. What are you planning? Where are you going? Who will you see? If there are no birds with feathers unlike yours anywhere in your plans for the month, ask God for guidance. Pray. Reflect. Is there some nudging from God in your heart that would send you in a new direction? That would lead you out of your comfort zone? If the thought of this makes you a little nervous, that could be the sign from the Holy Spirit that you are heading the right direction.

We could all make room in each week for contact with someone who is not like ourselves. If we consciously do this every week for the month of June—it may become a habit. It may tune our ears to God’s voice better and better. It may draw us closer to Christ, making us more useful instruments in his hands.

Following Christ, living this faith, is not for the faint at heart. It's a wild ride sometimes. Be prepared for that. But it is a WONDERFUL ride, filled with surprising blessings and full of wonder.

Let's do it! Let's go where God sends us! Amen.