

Bible Study
Proper 7, Year C
June 19, 2016

[RCL] **1Kings 19:1-4, (5-7), 8-15a; Psalm 42 and 43; Galatians 3:23-29; Luke 8:26-39**

1Kings 19:1-4, (5-7), 8-15a

Fearing for his life and in the depths of despair, Elijah journeys, not by his own strength, to the mountain of God. Awesome forces of nature go before God, but Elijah knows the Lord well enough to know that these terrifying sounds fall short of declaring God's glory. Instead, the sound of sheer silence is the most fitting for the presence of God. Elijah makes his case to the Lord, twice, how because of his faithfulness to God, his life is now in danger. And what is God's response? Is it: "You're right Elijah, I've asked too much of you, you should give up and hide." No. God says, "Go, return." Sending is in the very nature of God. Elijah is not sent by his own strength or his own zeal, but by the power of God, to face his fears, to realize his own limited nature and God's unlimited grace, and to participate in God's mission.

- When have you experienced the presence of God in silence?
- Have you ever felt called, or sent by God?

Psalm 42 and 43

The psalmist is consumed with longing and heaviness. Yet even from the depths of despair, the psalmist remembers who God is, God's love and faithfulness, God's marvelous deeds. Then something amazing happens, like nearly every other psalm of lament. Somehow in the remembering of who God is, despite the current terrible situation the psalmist is in, the heart of the psalmist is turned toward God. Trust in the Lord and gratitude is the fruit of this practice of remembering God. The pain does not go away, nor does the trouble, the anguish, the enemies, and yet everything is different. The change comes from within the heart, and in relationship with God.

- How important is the psalmist's first step of longing for God?
- What are ways that you can remember who God is, when you are in a difficult time?
- Is trusting in the Lord something a person can decide to do? Where does trust in God come from?

Galatians 3:23-29

Humans seem to be particularly adept at making categories, divisions, and delineations. Layers of social conditioning and choices we make, including bias, stereotyping, and racism compound the biological brain functioning that allows us to classify, for example, edible and inedible things. We experience the world, and even relationships, through these filters. Paul explains that Christ turns all of this upside down. The law encouraged holiness through separation, division, and apartness. But Christ encourages a different kind of holiness, holiness through Christ, in whom divisions do not exist. Christ who encourages us to break down these divisions, to see each other as siblings, to accept our mutual inheritance of the promise of God.

- In what ways is your church community living into this division-less identity in Christ? Where is there room to grow?
- What practices have helped you to overcome bias, stereotyping, or racism?

Luke 8:26-39

We hear very little from the man who is possessed by demons. The demons define him, who separate him completely from community, and who are the ones who speak to Jesus. After he is healed, it is the swine herders and townspeople who speak. Finally, as Jesus is leaving, we see the man begging to go with Jesus. Yet Jesus has a different vision for him. The man instead is sent out into his community in witness to the wonderful works of God in Christ. This man, an ultimate outsider, voiceless victim, unclean among the unclean, is chosen by Christ to bear his message. It is through no virtue or strength of the man, but through his brokenness that he is called.

- In what ways has God set you free or worked through your brokenness?
- Do you ever talk with non-Christians about faith, religion, Christ? Recall a conversation that was meaningful, and share.

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