

Such drama. The drama in life. Please understand that I am NOT using the term *drama* in the dismissive or superficial way that it is often used in popular culture today. The concept of drama came to me while reading today's scripture. With the dramatic weather and geologic conditions and the backdrop of fleeing for his life that Elijah experienced on Mt Horeb, or the loud and rolling seas in Matthew's gospel, Hollywood could employ its most fantastic, visual effects to portray the attention seizing drama of these two stories. These stories depict significant, transformative events in the lives of these well know bible characters

Where are the significant and transformative realities in our lives and how are we responding? Are we creating or adding to the proverbial storms and destruction, throwing our high pitched attention in unfruitful ways or onto misdirected targets? In our public tumult, to what leaders do we give credence? With what groups and ideas do we form alliances in addressing our shared challenges? In 2020 drama seems to be alive in too many arenas - in this active hurricane and wildfire season, with COVID, in politics across the globe, between Christian churches offering starkly different perspectives on what the call to social justice and a pro life stance looks like, in downtowns of public protest, on social media, and even in our once calm family and work interactions. Drama abounds and today's readings offer us ideas on where to find God and an opportunity to reflect on how we manage crises in our lives.

Today's readings involve three significant biblical men - Elijah, Paul and Peter. Their stories involve drama, some of it created by these men, some by nature, and some by the interaction between nature and men. God, the Divine One is in the center of the drama as a source of grounding, clarity, security, challenge and support. No surprise we are reading about men, but certainly after we look past the gender of the protagonists, maybe laugh at their diva qualities, even, women can find ways to enter these stories and find themselves. Let us look at the three readings in the order in which they were read and see what we can take away for our own lives.

The reading from First Kings finds Elijah at Mt Horeb, another name for Mt Sinai, where Moses received the 10 commandments and lead the wandering Israelites. In the verses before today's reading King Ahab's wife Jezebel had sent a messenger to Elijah to say he will be killed as she has had hundreds of prophets killed before him. The centuries of the Kings was filled with the many ways the kings and their people did not follow the Lord's commandments, in this case with Jezebel it was the sin of worshiping Baal. Elijah was one of the Old Testament prophets who spoke truth to masses of people and to powerful kings.

In the part just before our reading today, scripture says the Lord fed Elijah "cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water" after which Elijah walked 40 days and 40 nights to shelter in a cave in Mt Horeb. Reminiscent of Moses and symbolic periods of change and challenge, God protected Elijah and fed him on his journey. Once in the cave of Horeb, the Lord queried him, what are you doing here, Elijah?" He answers "I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts, and the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I am alone, am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away." Here we have another prophet like Moses who had experienced profound intervention from God when the prophet did not feel up to the task, felt confused, and was on the run from trouble and feared for his life. Our reading begins with God asking Elijah to go outside the cave as God was going to pass by.

Then we read about a series of dramatic weather conditions - a strong, heavy wind that was splitting mountains apart, crushing rocks, followed by an earthquake, then a fire. How does one respond to such energy and drama alive outside one's abode? Certainly these frightening and magnificent conditions were not over quickly, but rather required reliable and helpful strategies to get through the long, loud moments as Elijah endured the drama. Whether he was cowering in the corner, agitatingly praying up a storm inside the cave, Elijah was able to hear and be encouraged by a tiny whispering sound that followed. Out of respect not to look directly at God, Elijah covered his face in his cloak and stepped outside as he was asked to do. For some of us, mustering strength to stand up, the courage to step out into the world of fury outside our door, seems beyond impossible. Elijah shows us a deep connection that recognizes the call of the Divine. He has experience listening and heeding the call of His Creator to follow amidst one's active fears and the tumult of life.

Paul, another self described zealot, in a statement of deep faith and generosity said he was willing in essence to give up what gave him life - his connection to Christ - for the sake of his own people. Here in the Roman's passage Paul defines his people as the Israelites, who have adoption, the glory, the covenants, the laws, the worship and the promises. These are the heritage of the Jewish people. Paul, grounded in his heritage as a Jew lived from an evolved space as a Christian, a space of tension that he constantly needed to bridge, to reconcile and address publically as an evangelizer for Christ, our universal anointed one. Paul wrote the book of Romans towards the end of his career, about the year 58 after he had visited countless towns, been imprisoned for his witness

for Christ, and he was willing to be accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of other believers if that was to be required. If we are tested by life circumstances, or by our love for others we may find ourselves acting and speaking in new and dramatic ways, in ways that we might not have known ourselves capable of doing or speaking.

Which brings us to the high drama of Jesus and Peter walking on a stormy Sea of Galilee. The original translation of the bible uses the word **immediately** three times in this passage, not just once as the translation we heard this afternoon. We enter the story after Jesus had just learned that John the Baptist had been beheaded. Tensions are high. **Immediately**, the Greek translation reads, after Jesus miraculously fed the people, Jesus compelled, the Greek reads, the disciples to get into the boat. Maybe he was exhausted and short tempered and grieving. I imagine Jesus shooing the disciples, not letting them ask questions of him or talk among themselves.

Jesus then went up the mountain to pray, to find shelter, to hand over his day, his life, his worries to God and to discern where God wanted him to go next, and when he should go. Sometime on the fourth watch, which is between 3- 6 AM Jesus came toward the disciples walking on the sea. "It's a ghost they cried out in fear. **Immediately**, the Greek says, Jesus spoke to them, "Take courage, do not be afraid." Given the strength of the wind and the rolling of the boat I assume none of the disciples were asleep. Jesus quickly reassured them.

Then impulsive Peter, without a thought, goes from being totally afraid to saying, "okay, Lord, if that is really you, command me to get out of the boat and come to you." Stop and think about this. Who tests Jesus, or who is so over-exuberant to suggest that Jesus should invite him to get out of a rocking boat and walk on stormy seas? This is the same reactive Peter who, when the authorities came to arrest Jesus, Peter cut off the ear of the High Priest's servant. Impulsive Peter, who when Jesus wanted to wash his feet, first said no, I can't let you. Then when Jesus pressed him, Peter said, okay wash my feet and my hands and my head. Exuberant Peter, when he commits, he commits with enthusiasm.

I have to confess I can be impulsive myself, act without thinking, do things that make me look back in disbelief at what a stupid or thoughtless knee jerk reaction I had. How many of us react to others with things we are sorry we said, or who reply back in fear and anger, oh yeah, well if you do that then I am going do something else? When we are frightened, lonely, angry, hurt, we too often hurt others, do things we later regret, and in some cases, make life changing bad decisions.

The story continues. When Peter walked on the Sea he started to doubt what he was doing and began to sink. Immediately Jesus stretched out his hand and caught Peter. Jesus responded instantly. Just as the woman healed of her hemorrhaging touched Jesus' garment, Peter, I imagine, immediately felt that calming and safe presence that Jesus offered..... a quickening of grace for Peter.

Speaking to the shaken disciples, Jesus uses a term that the scripture commentary said was a stereotypical expression the evangelist Matthew uses for the disciples, *O ye of little faith*. Fr James Eblen of Seattle U joked and said the disciples were what he endearingly calls the little faithers. The disciples and others were little faithers. These are what we have been taught to understand as Jesus' inner circle- the chosen 12 - and Jesus rebukes them several times in scripture as people with inadequate faith. I know when my fears and negative assessments lead me, I am joining the little faithers group. When I react impulsively, or respond without bringing my grounding in God's faithfulness and offering love and peace to a situation, I am acting like a little faither.

Matthew ends this gospel story by saying when Peter and Jesus got back into the boat the wind died down. Just imagine the seas the two of them were walking on together. Today's reading ends on one of those rare moments, when the disciples, for once saw Jesus for who he was. The night of drama on the seas ends with the driving winds quieted. The disciples gave him homage and proclaimed, " Truly, you are the son of God."

In closing I invite you to stay spiritually grounded amidst life's drama. Elijah felt alone, insecure and persecuted and in spite of the drama, he lead people to faith through his role as truth speaker in divisive times. He served as a discerning conduit of God's guidance that came through a tiny whispering sound. Paul, in his zealous drive to convert people used his powers of persuasion and model of living, directed all his energies and willingly offered his own connection to Christ as a gift to his people. And Peter, impetuous and imperfect, Peter, the rock on which our Church is built, demonstrates how people of impulsive reactions, or in periods of inadequate faith, all have access to the responsive and caring Holy One who is present to us in all of our personal and our collective dramas in life. As we continue to live in uncertain and challenging times may we be spiritually awake and assured. May these fires in life refine us to live more as the image of God in which we have been created.