**“Sometimes You Can’t Make It On Your Own”**

*1 Kings 19:1-10*

A leprous moon sat against the roof of the night like some milky, unblinking eye. It painted the land with a sickly, ashen light, as if it would never be strong enough to withstand the onslaught of darkness around it. It hung uncaring in the heavens, oblivious to the fact that the lone man on the desert floor beneath it felt exactly the same way.

The man sat dejectedly beneath the spreading branches of a tree, the only sign of life the eye could see. He had collapsed there a short while ago, unable to make his stiffening legs carry him one step further.

Despite the heaviness of his legs, it was his mind and spirit which were heavier still. Both felt like monstrous stones within him, wearing him down, crushing him with their burden. He sighed aloud, a peculiar sound in the desert silence. Sometimes…sometimes he wished his breath would just leave permanently.

Crossing his legs under him, he placed his head in both hands, covering his face, as if to hide from the pale moon above. A familiar ache began to thicken inside him—a heaviness of heart, a feeling of complete apathy. Another heavy sigh escaped him. He knew these feelings all too well. Sometimes they came upon him without warning, like a bandit in the night. Sometimes he just woke up in the morning and knew he was going to have to force himself to function because he was smothered in a hazy half-world of sorrow and defeat.

No matter how much he tried to pray during these times, it felt pointless; it was too much effort to try and put words together to form a prayer. He longed for the closeness of God but felt as if he were sitting at the bottom of a forgotten well. Then there were the times when he just felt like weeping. There never seemed to be a reason. Like the moodiness, it just came upon him, overwhelming him with its power. And now--with everything that had taken place in the past few days--he felt anxiety clamping down on his heart.

He lay down on his side, sighing despondently, and drew his knees up to his chest. A chill desert breeze rustled the leaves of the tree overhead. He was so tired--and not just physically. He was tired of everything, even his own life. As he lay there, his thoughts traveled back to how all this began…

After a three-year drought that devastated the land of Israel, he had followed God’s instructions and presented himself before King Ahab—a task which had taken all his resolve and faith, for Ahab was a dangerous and corrupt ruler. He had endorsed the diabolical worship of Baal and Asherah--encouraged by his vicious queen, Jezebel--and thereby plunged the nation into idolatry and evil.

The prophet proclaimed God’s warning to Ahab. And to back up the message, he had boldly told the king to gather all the prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel. There would be a test to see whose god was real. Of course, the test of sacrifice that followed had been no test at all, really, because there is only one true and living God. Baal never answered his frenzied prophets, despite their self-mutilation, chanting and screaming. But his God—Yahweh--had answered immediately.

A scintillating fire had plummeted from the sky, devouring not only the sacrifice but the altar as well. After that, everything melted into chaos. His countrymen cried out, “The Lord—he is God!” as they chased down the fleeing prophets of Baal. People were scuttling in every direction—away from the roaring inferno on the mountain, away from the Israelites, even away from him. He could remember the rush of glory, the thrill of knowing that God had used him and worked through him! It had been a magnificent moment, and he had been right at the heart of it.

Afterward, he was in desperate need of rest. The drought across the land had affected him as much as anyone else and he was weak; he hadn’t been eating well; he had been on-the-go for the last twenty-four hours. He needed sleep, and was just thinking about where he could go to enjoy some when the news arrived…

Queen Jezebel was the real power behind the throne of Israel. She was a perilous, conniving woman whose malevolent control of Ahab and the royal court was like that of a boated spider crouched in the center of its web. Her hands were drenched in the blood of Yahweh’s prophets. Her brutality was unspeakable and her wrath legendary.

And now he had incurred that wrath. The message he received was simple enough: “*You’re a dead man! I am going to make sure there isn’t even a scrap of you left to bury. Within the next 24 hours, I swear to do to you what you did to my prophets of Baal! You cannot hide. You cannot escape. I will come for you, and you will beg me for death.”*

Filled with anxiety, fearful for his life--fatigued, depressed, frustrated, and angry--the prophet Elijah rolled these thoughts through his mind. He needed to formulate a plan for tomorrow--a course of action that would take him far from Jezebel’s malignant grasp. But he was so very tired. His eyelids were heavy. Now that his body had time to relax and unwind, he found himself completely exhausted. He closed his eyes, longing to be free...

I believe Elijah shows us two kinds of healing that we often overlook, neglect, or perhaps even ignore. **The first is the need among many people for mental healing—for comfort, peace and strength of mind.** I don’t know about you, but when I read this account of Elijah’s flight from Jezebel, I see a man suffering from what we call depression. He exhibited plenty of its symptoms.

He was fatigued by all that had happened to him: the confrontation with King Ahab; the extremely emotional and physically draining day on Mount Carmel; receiving a death threat from Queen Jezebel; the terror-filled flight into the desert. We read in verses 5, ***Then he lay down and slept*** *under the broom tree*. And again in verse 6*, So he ate and drank* ***and lay down again****.*

Elijah was also suicidal, a serious indication of depression: *He sat down under a solitary broom tree* ***and prayed that he might die****. “I have had enough, Lord,” he said. “****Take my life****, for I am no better than my ancestors...”* This man of God had just come from a literal mountaintop experience where God’s might and sovereignty were on full display. But then he found himself in the depths of despair. His emotions were on a roller-coaster, and when emotions are really down, suicidal thoughts can often creep in.

Then there was frustration and anger. For being obedient to God’s commands, he found himself a hunted fugitive. And on top of that, the majority of the people of his country had turned their backs on God. Listen what he said in verse 10: *“I have zealously served the Lord God Almighty. But the people of Israel have broken their covenant with you, torn down your altars, and killed every one of your prophets. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me, too.”* For all his faithfulness, obedience and good works, Elijah felt alone, lost and overwhelmed. The prophet experienced a very serious depression.

A great many people in our families, church and community experience depression. For some it’s managed by medication; for others, it hits with debilitating force and surrounds them with darkness for days or weeks on end. It is very real, and it is very painful.

And if we suffer from depression, we question ourselves constantly. Is my faith not strong enough? Why can’t I pray? Why does God seem so far away and so uncaring? We begin to think we are incapable of being loved by God. After all, if we can’t even shake off a little depression and “get on with life,” how could we ever be of value to God? We try to screw up the courage and energy to get up, to go out, to do something—but more often than not we cannot. And we blame ourselves even more.

Depression comes in many forms, with different strengths, and with different triggers. The loss of a beloved spouse may bring on depressive episodes. Changes in life such as divorce, children leaving home, financial loss, or broken relationships can cause it. Stress and anxiety are prime contributors to depression as we find ourselves becoming increasingly short and snappy, moody, withdrawn, unable to focus, and unable to sleep. The raw truth is that there are more people around us right now who are affected by depression than we realize.

**The second kind of healing Elijah shows us is the need among church people for emotional and spiritual healing**. Elijah was a great and powerful man of God. He was in the midst of a very successful ministry. God had used him to withhold, then bring, rain. He defiantly stood against King Ahab. He was the first Old Testament prophet to raise a person from the dead.

And yet, despite all these accomplishments he was wounded in spirit. He did everything God called him to do, and for his faithfulness he was hunted like a rabid dog. Finally he came to the end of his rope. He was tired. He was worn out. He’d done so much for the cause of the Lord, and he was beat up on the inside.

Christians get wounded all the time in their service to the Lord. All too often that wounding comes at the hands of other believers. It was someone serving on a committee with you; it was someone on the board; it was someone in worship or in Sunday school. Regardless of when or where, you were trying to do the right thing for Christ, and you received a verbal assault for doing so.

Most of us try to act like it was nothing—that what was said or done didn’t really bother us. But in truth, it wounded us deeply. Some of us still bear the scars of fights over pastoral leadership, use of facilities, Sunday school curriculum, social needs, or overbearing controllers. We do our best to cover these scars with our “Sunday face,” but they are still there within us. And we wonder if we’re losing our faith--if we’re a bad person--if we’re not strong enough?

***Some of you may be familiar with contemporary Christian artist Twila Paris. In 1984 she released a song that speaks to our pain and woundedness in the church, and our need for healing at the hands of Jesus Christ. The lyrics to the song are printed in your bulletin insert. They say, “Lately I've been winning battles left and right / But even winners can get wounded in the fight / People say that I'm amazing / Strong beyond my years / But they don't see inside of me / I'm hiding all the tears / They don't know that I go running home when I fall down / They don't know who picks me up when no one is around / I drop my sword and cry for just a while / 'Cause deep inside this armor / The warrior is a child / Unafraid because His armor is the best / But even soldiers need a quiet place to rest / People say that I'm amazing / Never face retreat / But they don't see the enemies / That lay me at His feet / They don't know that I go running home when I fall down / They don't know who picks me up when no one is around / I drop my sword and cry for just a while / 'Cause deep inside this armor / the warrior is a child.***

Some of our warriors here this morning need to be picked up. Some need to come home and cry for just a while at the feet of Jesus. And we are able to do this because Christ is our shelter, our peace, our healing--just as he was for Elijah.

We read: *But as [Elijah] was sleeping, an angel touched him and told him, “Get up and eat!” He looked around and there beside his head was some bread baked on hot stones and a jar of water!* …*Then the angel of the Lord came again and touched him and said, “Get up and eat some more, or the journey ahead will be too much for you.”*

One of the greatest prophets in the history of Israel needed healing. He needed care. And our loving God provided it for him—just as he desires to provide it for you here today. We need that special touch from the Lord that restores, comforts and strengthens us for the journey ahead.

If you have volunteered to help at the altar this morning, please come forward now.

In just a moment you will have the opportunity to come up to the altar to be anointed and prayed for. Some of you may have physical needs you wish to receive prayer for. For others it may be mental or emotional needs, as we have talked about in this message. You may want to come and ask for prayer for someone who is not here.

As we have done in times past, you are strongly encouraged to bring someone with you as you come forward. It’s easier to take that walk with someone by your side. They are a physical representation of the presence and grace of Christ—a companion in the body of Christ—a friend or loved one who will support you.

***The Irish rock band U2 has a song entitled “Sometimes You Can’t Make It On Your Own.” We heard it this morning during the offering. It says, “Tough, you think you've got the stuff / You're telling me and anyone / You're hard enough / You don't have to put up a fight / You don't have to always be right / Let me take some of the punches / For you tonight / Listen to me now / I need to let you know / You don't have to go it alone.”*** My brothers and sisters, you don’t have to bear the burden alone. You don’t have to suffer in silence. Sometimes we can’t make it on our own. We need one another. And we need the Lord.

Come as the Spirit of Christ leads you. Bring someone with you. Receive the refreshing, comfort and healing that the God of Elijah has for you. Amen.