

Sermon for the Last Sunday of Epiphany
February 26, 2006
St. Mary of the Hills, Blowing Rock
The Rev. Jeanne Finan

What are you doing here?

O, Elijah!
I know how you feel!

I don't blame you for running away,
 hiding in this cave
 up on the mountain.

I feel that way myself sometimes.
 Life is going along just swimmingly--
 and then,
 suddenly,
 things just fall apart.

I understand, Elijah.
 That was quite a show down you had at Carmel.
 You really showed up those false prophets
 from Ahab and Jezebel's court.
 OOH-WHEE! You showed them what Yahweh can do.

Only word has it that Queen Jezebel is a rather poor loser.
 And regardless of your devotion to God, Elijah,
 your face is the one on her MOST WANTED poster.
 She most wants to destroy you.
 Kill Elijah!
 Some thanks for sharing the good news, huh?

I think you did the right thing.
To run. To hide.

After all
 we do our best, our very, very best.
 We work so hard. We try to make everything just perfect.

But who really cares?
Nobody.

Poor me! Poor me!

(That's Elijah lamenting...
he's the only one left, you see.
All the other prophets are dead.
They want him dead, too.)

Poor me! Poor me!

(Or maybe that's not Elijah...
maybe that's you..or me...)

Poor me!

But then God shows up.

God shows up and says,
What are you doing here?

*No, you may not just sit here hiding in your cave,
whimpering about how horrible to world is,
how mean Jezebel is,
how everyone else has let both you and me down!*
We are not going there.

*Don't do it, Elijah.
Don't waste your time.
Don't waste your life.
Go!*

You see, sometimes we seek assurance, comfort,
support that we are right and indeed, we have been wronged.
We want God to say,
You poor baby! No wonder you ran! No wonder you're hiding!
Don't worry your little head about a thing.
I'll take care of everything.

And sometimes, we do get that.

But other times, like Elijah,
we get a mandate,
rather than a kiss on the forehead.
We don't get our "poor baby" hug.
What we get from God
is a "buck up and take an aspirin" shove.

Go.
Choose.
Decide.
Do.
Get up and get out of this cave!

Speaking of caves,
I have been thinking a lot about caves this week.

On Thursday, fifty of us traveled to Discovery Place in Charlotte
to see the Dead Sea Scrolls exhibition.
Absolutely magnificent.

Scrolls that were discovered in the 1950's,
but were written, of course, many of them,
thousands of years earlier.
Hidden away in jars,
tucked inside the caves of Q'umran.
There is still much mystery around those scrolls,
about those caves and that community.

A cave is a place of protection, of safety.
A place where no one will look.
where no one will find us.
where no one will see us sitting alone in the dark.
Hiding.

There's only one problem.
God is very, very good
at the game of Hide and Seek.

We are the ones, like Elijah,
who try to hide.
God is the one
who never gives up seeking.
Seeking.
Looking for us.

Each Sunday as our worship service opens,
the priest stands behind the altar and prays to God with these words....

*...to you all hearts are open, all desires known,
from you no secrets are hid.*

And if there is a truer prayer, I do not know it.

And if there is a prayer that should terrify us more,
I do not know it.

*...to you all hearts are open, all desires known,
from you no secrets are hid.*

God knows Elijah's heart.
Just as God knows your heart and my heart.
That is why God shows up and says,
What are you doing here?

We may be able to hide from the Jezebels of our lives
(and that includes trying to hide from ourselves sometimes),
but we cannot hide from God.

God knows our true heart.
God knows that Elijah does not have a go-hide-in-a-cave heart.
God knows this is not who Elijah really is.

So God says, GO!
Go, Elijah. Move it!
Be whom you are really called to be.

We are not here for everything in our lives to be perfect.
If we think because of our faith,
because of our deep love for God.
that we will do everything right,
that we will never make mistakes,
that we will never suffer,
that we will never be discouraged
that we will never feel like running, hiding away in a cave—
if we expect that of ourselves or of others,
then yes, we will be rudely awakened.

We will have made the mistake of believing that God loves perfection,
rather than the truth—which is that God loves us.
Wonderfully, marvelously made, imperfect us.

We are not here to hide ourselves away in a cave,
to shut the door of our hearts,
just because on occasion,
a door or a heart has been shut to us.

We are here to live remembering that God's heart
is always open to us.
More open than an all-night diner.
Open 24/7.

Even at times when we are just bound and determined
to NOT be in relationship with God--
or anyone else for that matter—

we're depressed, we're tired, we're lonely,
we're skeptical, we're mad, we're hurt--

...even when we are ready to abandon our relationship with God,
God never abandons us.

Never.

God keeps showing up.
God keeps asking us,
What are you doing here?