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1 Kings 19:9-18
Matthew 14:22-33

“I’m Following You ... “

Our granddaughter Alyson spent the greater part of the past two weeks with us. The days were filled with adventures.

Walking down our apartment hallway early last week, Alyson went at her normal quick pace ... and said, “I’m following you, grandpa.” Following me? She was already 20 feet ahead of me.

Where I usually turn right to get to the elevator to go downstairs to parking ... Alison turned right. But I kept going straight down the hallway because I was on my way to deliver a message to Roy at the far end of the hallway. I went a ways ... then turned around. Needless to say, Alyson was not following.

So I walked back..turned ...looked down the hallway towards the elevator. No Alyson. Where was she?

Then I saw the tips of her sparkling sneakers jutting out from the elevator doorway. She had squeezed herself into that nook.

I said, “I spy Alyson at the elevator.” She leaped out and shouted, “I’m following you, grandpa.”

Ha ... following me? Well, you know 5 year old children. Alyson knows a lot.

She knows what you’re going to say before you say it.

She has been there, She has done that.

“I’m following you, grandpa.”

But even more than grandpa. I’m great grandpa ... certainly that should count for something ... count for even more faithful following.

And I thought. (No I didn’t say it nor did I lecture for I know Alison will learn soon enough). “No Alyson, you were simply

following a well-worn path that I had taken for a week or so. But today Grandpa has chosen a different/another path.” That’s Grandpa’s prerogative.

Elijah was an exceptional prophet ... Elijah followed God, There’s no doubt about that.

Elijah heard God’s prompts.

Elijah discerned God’s will.

Elijah spoke for God.

And Elijah had this burning zeal to restore God’s people to God’s way of living.

But too many of the Lord God’s people had become distracted and turned to other gods ... to Baal, for example. Baal was one of the gods of the land – a creation of the people.

King Ahab and Jezebel worshipped Baal.

And in faithful response, Elijah had killed with the sword all the prophets of Baal ... and Jezebel was furious at Elijah and sent him a message ...

In plain English Jezebel; wrote, “Elijah, you have twenty four hours to live. Then you are dead.”

And Elijah did what any self-respecting believer in the Lord God would do ... **HE TURNED ... AND RAN.**

He ran into the wilderness and whined ... “It is enough that I might die. “O Lord, take away my life for I am no better than my ancestors.”

So after some sleep and a bite to eat he continued his run south.

He ran forty days and forty nights to Horeb. Back to old Mount Sinai ... the Mount of God. And on Mount Sinai he found a cave, and spent the night deep in the cave.

Please understand, Elijah was a faithful prophet of God.

He spoke for God.

He called people back to the ways of God.

That was during the good-old days.

When things were going well for Elijah.

When he had been tasting victories over his adversaries, that is over the Lord God's adversaries.

But when mean queen Jezebel and her feckless husband King Ahab threatened, "Elijah, by tomorrow you will be dead!"

Elijah ran south.

40 days south to escape and regroup and recoup.

But here's a remarkable thing: 40 days on the run ... through deep wilderness ... Elijah found himself at Mount Sinai – the ancient covenanting place, where this all got started between the Lord God and Moses, and a special ... a chosen people gathered and commissioned hundreds of years earlier – And there, in a Sinai cave, Elijah was awakened by the word of the Lord.

What was he doing deep in a cave? Certainly hoping to be safe from Jezebel's fury, yes, but also deeply troubled by his own lack of faith, Guilt ate at Elijah's heart and soul. He had not followed-through on his promises to follow God. He had turned and ran.

"Elijah, what are you doing here?" Elijah explained, "I did a lot for you, God, And what has that gotten for me? I've been defending your holy way. Now I alone am left, and Jezebel and her henchmen are seeking my life, to take it away." I'm dead meat.

"Elijah ...come out of that cave and stand on the mountain, for the Lord is going to pass by ..."

And there was a great wind ...

and the Lord was not in the wind.

And then, an earthquake ...

and the Lord was not in the earthquake.

And after the earthquake...

a fire ... and the Lord was not in the fire.

And after the fire ...

a sound of sheer silence.

I wonder ... what was the content of that sheer silence?

Perhaps Elijah detected the ancient call of Moses in a bush that burned but was not consumed.

“I am who I Am.” “I Am sends you.”

Surrounded by an awesome, unspeakable presence Elijah is astonished. “I have been running from God and from Jezebel, Elijah recognizes, “and I have run right back into God’s welcoming arms.” What have I to fear.

Elijah ventured-out and stood in the entrance of the cave.

”Elijah, the Lord speaks ... “go back home ... and anoint a whole new line of kings who will be faithful to me. Anoint Hazael, and Jehu, and Elisha, as a faithful prophet who will follow you.”

”All who oppose you will be killed. But 7000 in Israel will remain. All who have not knelt to Baal. All who have not kissed Baal. All who are faithful to the Lord God”

“I’m following you, grandpa.” Great grandpa. I’m following you, Lord God.” I know the way. I’ve been this way many times.

Yes...you have been that particular way. But the Lord God is Lord of many ways. And he meets us and welcomes us and sets us on tasks that show his way in this changing, glorious panorama we call life. To express his love.

I confess that in this story there’s a lot of killing going on. Elijah and the Isrealite Kings promote it. Ahab and Jezebel promote it. It’s quite a blood-bath. This morning I won’t dwell on that, but I have a gospel lesson to propose. It’s the Gospel lesson for this Sunday. Matthew 14:22-33

Jesus has spoken to the crowds, fed them and sent them on their way.

²² Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. ²³ And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he

was there alone,²⁴ but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land,^[a] for the wind was against them.²⁵ And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea.²⁶ But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, “It is a ghost!” And they cried out in fear.²⁷ But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, “Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.”

²⁸ Peter answered him, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.”²⁹ He said, “Come.” So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus.³⁰ But when he noticed the strong wind,^[b] he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, “Lord, save me!”³¹ Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?”³² When they got into the boat, the wind ceased.³³ And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”

You get into this Bible book, not because you're without fear – in fact, recurring phrases in this story are “terrified, “cried in fear, “became frightened, “don't be afraid ... but rather you get into the book because you step out of the boat,

Fierce winds of change may be buffeting your life, and the changes may be within the church ... or within your family ... or you just can't put your finger on it ... but ground is shifting under you and it's terribly unnerving, Let go. Let God.

Step out of the boat.

Or you're swallowed by overwhelming loneliness, or illness is shredding your hopes for the future. Don't despair. Don't turn back ... step out of the boat.

You get into the Bible book, not because you have been perfect in following Jesus ... rather, because you step out of the boat.

You are remembered among the faithful, not because you have every answer, or solved every puzzle, but you are among the faithful because you step out of the boat.

You are counted among the saints of God, not because of what you have accomplished, the awards you have attained, the mountains you have climbed, but because you are God's child, and God loves you with an everlasting love. Step out of the boat.

What is so clear in this passage is that if we are to be faithful to the call of Christ, we are called to step-out in faith, even in the midst of troubled waters.

Stepping out in faith is no guarantee that we will not face troubled waters or be scared to death, but stepping out is always accompanied by the assurance that Jesus will not abandon us,
 that when we need him most, Jesus extends his hand to hoist us up and get us back into the boat.

The key to faith and fullness of life in Christ is to follow Peter's example and be willing to step out of the security of the boat and head into the troubled waters of our neighborhood, our cities, the world to proclaim and show the love and mercy and justice of God that we find in Jesus Christ.

Being Jesus' disciple is a risky and exciting business, but that is exactly what God calls us to do and to be, and God assures us that when we step out of the boat, we can count on the strong mercies of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

"I'm following you, Grandpa." "I'm following you, Lord Jesus." That has been chanted by young and old down through generations. The problem comes when we are striding 20 feet ahead. Or is it 20 miles? On paths we know so well, so familiar, so comfortable. Well out of earshot.

Traveling on well-worn paths of the past.

So well-traveled that they have turned into ruts.

And it is very difficult to discover new routes/
 To explore new ways.

And the Lord burrows deep to find us in our cave, or in our storm-tossed boat ... "What are you doing here?"

"It is I, master of ocean and wind and fire.

"Come out of your cave.

"Step from your boat."

NOW take my hand – **AND LIVE.**

AND LET US ALL RECOGNIZE JESUS AS LORD.
 TRULY, YOU ARE THE SON OF GOD.