



1616 W. Mequon Road, Mequon WI 53092  
(262)241-3121 [www.stjohnsmequon.org](http://www.stjohnsmequon.org)  
Email: [office@stjohnsmequon.org](mailto:office@stjohnsmequon.org)  
**Pastor James Tiefel**  
**(262) 853-9723 (cell#)**  
Email: [pastortiefel@gmail.com](mailto:pastortiefel@gmail.com)

---

## The Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost August 13, 2023

### The Christian Answers Doubt with Faith

Even when faith clings to the promises of God, doubts often linger in our minds. We trust in God but wonder and worry when his plans fail to match our own. Today we hear Jesus ask us, "Why did you doubt?" The answer to doubt is not always found in great miracles that remove our troubles but in the gentle whisper of God's Word. In our series entitled DEFINE CHRISTIAN, we describe a Christian as someone who answers doubt with faith.

#### Sermon 1 Kings 19:9-18

**And the word of the LORD came to him: "What are you doing here, Elijah?"**

**<sup>10</sup> He replied, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too."**

**<sup>11</sup> The LORD said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by."**

**Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake.**

**<sup>12</sup> After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper.**

**<sup>13</sup> When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.**

**Then a voice said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"**

**<sup>14</sup> He replied, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too."**

**<sup>15</sup> The LORD said to him, "Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus. When you get there, anoint Hazael king over Aram. <sup>16</sup> Also, anoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet. <sup>17</sup> Jehu will put to death any who escape the sword of Hazael, and Elisha will put to death any who escape the sword of Jehu. <sup>18</sup> Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and whose mouths have not kissed him."**

Introduction – Remember this? You're in the car on your way to some fun event—a Brewer's game or Great America—and the kids are in the backseat. Everybody's quiet for a while, but then the first voice pipes up: "Are we there yet?" You just smile. "No, it takes an hour to get there." Quiet for 15 minutes. Another voice: "Are we there yet?" And you just laugh. Remember that? Or it's Christmas morning and the presents are all under tree, and you hear a little voice from the living room, "Can we open just one, just one?" And you just laugh. "No, you can't open just one." Or the teenager storms into the kitchen. "I'm starving! If I don't eat right now, I'm going to die!" And you just laugh. "Keep your hands off that food." Kids are forever impatient. It's part of being a kid. My dad used to say, "Ruhig blut"—calm your blood! And then he just laughed.

We don't laugh so much when adults get impatient. We've all heard it. The service department guy said he would call in the morning and now it's 1:00 in the afternoon. That guy is a crook. The doctor said it would take time to heal, but this is ridiculous. They were supposed to be in church this morning but the bells are ringing and they're not here. You can see the steam rising. We kind of groan and roll our eyes and we go, "Would you please calm down?" "Ruhig Blut"—and we're not laughing. Adults need to know better than to be impatient.

Christians need to know better, too, but sometimes we don't and sometimes we get impatient. I'm not talking about being impatient with one another—that's a different sermon. What's a lot worse is being impatient with God. We all believe in God; We know his promises and we trust his promises. But sometimes God doesn't keep his promises the way we figure he should. Sometimes what we expect God to do isn't what he does. And then we wonder about him and then we doubt and our confidence sinks and our faith shrinks and we get surly and whiney.

That's what was happening with Elijah in the First Reading this morning. Elijah was dealing with a whole string of challenges and he had some nasty ideas for fixing them. The trouble was, the Lord wasn't on board with Elijah's ideas. Elijah wondered and he doubted and he whined and he complained. And so the Lord took him to a mountain and showed him what the plans were and how they were going to work. At the bottom line the Lord said to Elijah:

### **Wait for the Whisper**

1. We met Elijah last Sunday when he approached King Ahab with the news about a devastating drought. Ahab wasn't really happy about that and so Elijah got out of town for a while. The Lord preserved him with some ravens and a widow. The time came for the drought to end and for the real face-off to begin. Elijah challenged 450 priests of Baal to a dual by fire and the people of Israel gathered on Mt. Carmel to watch the showdown. You know how this ended: Baal lost the dual and the Lord won and the people vowed to serve the Lord. The rains returned and Elijah was confident a new age of faith had arrived. Never happened. What was worse was that Jezebel, Ahab's awful queen, was out to get him. The Bible tells us that **Elijah was afraid and ran for his life**. He was ready to die; he was a prophet and felt like a failure. Then God's special messenger, the Angel of the Lord, led Elijah to Mt. Horeb. **He found a cave and spent the night.**

**And the word of the LORD came to him: "What are you doing here, Elijah?" He replied, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too."** Elijah was whining but he was doubting, too. So the Lord could send a drought to famish Israel and he could send fire to burn up an altar but where was the knockout punch? Where was the annihilation of these godless idolaters in Israel? Elijah was saying: If you want to call your chosen people back to faith, do something that works! What you're doing now obviously isn't working! When I signed on as a prophet, I was expecting more than this.

I guess I know how Elijah felt; maybe you do, too. We take our Christianity seriously, but other people sure don't. The church isn't growing like God said it would. In our country the number of people who claim to be Christian is shrinking and the number that claims no religion is growing. God abhors sexual sins but people parade LGBTQ freedoms and demand transgender rights. People kill babies and sexually abuse children. Pornography is a billion-dollar industry. Even people who claim to be Christians don't live like Christians. They sit in their pew on Sunday and stink up their lives the rest of the week. We may even know people like this; some people call them carnal Christians. So we whine about this and there's doubt in our whining. Do you really care about this God? If we want the church to be alive and great again, you better do something that works. Where are the laws that punish these people? Where are the candidates willing to make the laws? Where are the pandemics that kill off bad people, not just old people? Where are the preachers who attract the crowds or the music that excites them? If you're going to restore and revitalize the church, Lord, where's the knock-out punch?

**The LORD said to Elijah, “Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by.”** The Lord was about to show Elijah what he was really all about. **Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.**

Elijah knew instantly what the Lord was teaching him. The Lord uses his power to punish the wicked—and he would do that in Israel—but the essence of God is love and love is what God uses to change people. God’s love isn’t loud and blaring. God’s love came to us in a gentle man who lived and died to take away sin. That gentle man became sin that we might be called innocent, he endured shame that we might be honored, he paid sin’s penalty that we might be free, he emptied himself that we might be rich. No wind or earthquake or fire there; nothing to attract attention—just a gentle whisper, just a still, small voice. We call that gentle whisper the good news, the gospel. And at the center of the whisper is the voice of Jesus.

There are times when we wonder about God’s ways, times we doubt how serious God really is to carry out his will in our world. But when you think about it, we can be pretty thankful that God works in us with that quiet whisper. The kind of power we would like him to display to others isn’t the power we want him to display to us. We may not sin as often or as crudely as some people in our society but one sin is enough to earn all kinds of God’s anger and we’ve all committed a lot more than one sin. But we’ve heard the whisper. The whisper sounded in our hearts at baptism and wrapped us in the arms of God. It speaks to us softly in worship and Bible study and personal devotions. It convinces us to walk away from sin every day and move closer to Jesus. In our lives with Jesus there aren’t many cheering crowds or brass bands or fireworks—just a whisper. But the whisper of the gospel is enough.

God had nasty plans for Israel that Elijah couldn’t know. Hazeal would reign in Syria and plague the Jewish rebels for decades. Jehu would reign in Israel and wipe out Ahab’s royal family for good. Elisha would succeed Elijah as God’s punishing voice to his unfaithful people. The Lord would use plenty of his power to attack and destroy evil. But when it came to calling people to repentance and faith, he would use the gentle whisper just as he had before and just as he would again and just as he did for the 7,000 who remained faithful and did not bow down to Baal.

It’s tough living in an evil world and sinful society. Nobody disagrees, not even Jesus. We get impatient with God sometimes and wonder why he doesn’t do more to change people. We have our doubts for sure, just like Elijah. But there is only one way to change a heart, only one way to put down a sin, only one way to mold a lifestyle, only one way to envision the end of it all. That one way is the gospel: your sins are forgiven. So “Ruhig blut;” quiet your blood and **wait for the whisper.**