

St. Paul: On The Same page

01.19.14 Epiphany 3a

Day One: 1 Kings 19:9-18

Then a voice said 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."

"Nobody likes me; everybody hates me; guess I'll go eat worms..." Did you sing that song when you were a child?

No one seems to know where that song came from, but everyone knows the feeling. Elijah felt it. He had proclaimed the truth even at the risk of his life. He had endured famine, and had to hide for 3 years. Then, in his great moment of victory, when the truth of his message was publicly shown against the prophets of Baal, suddenly it was all undone. The queen swore to have him killed.

Like a child, he recites a long list of his problems, ending with this, "I am the

"What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs."

Matthew 10:27

only one left..." God listened patiently, but he corrected Elijah's false impression. He was NOT the only one.

What would be on your list of woes today? You are probably not worried about anyone trying to hurt you – but we could easily be frustrated. Governments, nature, schools, cities, neighborhoods, even our own families are broken! When will God fix it?! Our Lord listens patiently, and then he gives us comfort. He has a plan. He has paid for all our sins!

Prayer: *Father, you already know my list of complaints. I have told you many times. Lord, help me hear your list of loving answers, and wait for the fulfillment of your loving plan for my life. Amen.*

Day Two: 1 Cor 15:54-58

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

I've said it before, one of the most important words in the Bible is "therefore." Think of the word "therefore" as being like an arrow – one statement leads to the next statement.

God gave us the victory → therefore → we should stand firm.

The second idea, that God says we should be strong and keep on working without being discouraged, is easier said than done, isn't it? Like Elijah in our Old Testament lesson, don't you sometimes just want to quit?

Haven't you tried long enough to fix a person's broken life without success? Haven't you struggled long enough against your own sin? We have fought against the killing of children in our own country for 41 years, with no result. Isn't it time to give up?

But look at that first idea. Paul reminds us that Jesus has conquered death. He has taken away its sting. He has removed the power of sin. He has given us victory!

THAT is why we can keep sharing the message of Life, because we know that all our work is not for nothing. Our Savior has won!

Therefore, we can stand firm when we feel like falling. Therefore, we can be unmoved by the world's evil. We aren't knocked over by it because we know that in the end the world is powerless over us. Therefore, we always give ourselves to the work of the Lord. We continue to serve – we continue to give – we continue to speak the truth – we continue to worship and to invite others to come to the Lord with us because we know that our "labor in the Lord is not in vain."

Prayer: *O Lord, I'm working and working. Sometimes it seems as if that's all I do. Sometimes I get so tired and discouraged. Remind me of the victory, not in some far distant future, but the victory I already enjoy! I have LIFE in you! Amen.*

Day Three: Matt 10:17-31

[Jesus said,] "But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.... What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs."

Bumper stickers, billboards, trucks with signs, posters, newspaper advertisements, FaceBook, Twitter, blogs and news sites. We have no shortage of places to express OPINIONS!

But Jesus is not talking about billboards or bumpers when he says that we will know what to say. Jesus is talking about our face-to-face opportunities to express in words the wonder of what God has done.

There is a lot of arguing going on around us. We put our opinions on the bumpers of our cars – candidates we support – candidates we oppose – even insults for those who might support the wrong person. And Christians join the parade, putting our faith into a short stab of truth that we

hope will make someone stop and think.

But is this what Jesus meant when he told us we would be given the words to speak? Are these clever one-liners and sarcastic stickers really the best that we can do?

We want to do more than just win a political argument about abortion. We want to tell all the world that God is the author of life, and that every life is precious to him. We want to do more than win the right to display a Christmas scene in the public square. We want to show the love of our Savior and the life he gives by talking face-to-face with those who need to know him.

We have been called, not just to win a political argument, but to win *people* for whom Jesus died. And we can speak courageously and joyfully, because we have more than just a bumper sticker attack. We have the Good News to share.

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, send your Holy Spirit to me, just as he came upon Andrew. Let me hear, tell, and lead someone to you. Amen.*

Day Four: How many is a million?

I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Genesis 22:17

You probably use a really large number, or at least the name for one, every day. A googol is a 1 with 100 zeros after it.

Of course, numbers like that aren't very useful for doing your grocery shopping, or calculating the payoff on your mortgage. Thankfully! In fact, large numbers run out of usefulness for us pretty quickly. Most of us don't get very far into the thousands in our day to day life. We get to the point where we cannot really conceive of the size of such numbers as a billion or a trillion or an octoseptuagintillion (237 zeros). These are unreal numbers to us.

“If only one man dies of hunger, that is a tragedy. If millions die, that's only statistics.” That sentence has been attributed to Joseph Stalin, but it is sadly true of us.

We cannot comprehend the deaths of over 50 million unborn children, the grieving or confused or conflicted

mothers, the broken and wounded families that are represented by such a number. But in our country there are more than a million children who are killed by abortion every single year. In the city of New York, 41% of all pregnancies end in abortion.

Whether they represent good things or bad, large numbers are hard for us to grasp. God's promise to Abraham was too big for him to fully appreciate. But God values each and every single life in the same way. He says, “See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands...” (Is.49:16)

You are not a statistic. You are God's child. These children are not numbers. They are individuals. God calls us to care for each child, and each mother, and each person who is grieving, struggling, wandering, or afraid. Our Father has loved them one at a time.

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, there are so many people in the world. And the number of poor, of suffering, of children endangered by abortion is beyond my comprehension. Let me comprehend just one today, and love that one. Amen.*