

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.  
Amen

You've heard it before, we've said it often, "You walk by faith and not by sight."

- So, I begin this morning by asking you.....how is your faith journey going?

How are you doing in walking with Jesus?

- Are you in step with Him?
- Or, are you doing okay, but could be doing better? Sort of like, stumbling along.
- Or have you fallen and it seems like you are left behind in the dust?

Those are all possibilities and perhaps choices at different points in your life.....or even in a day!

- And even if you are doing pretty good, would you like to do better?
- Have a little more hop in your step and be closer, side by side with Jesus.

For most of us, or dare I say all of us, we would like to do better in our walking with Jesus.

- We would like our faith eye sight to be better.
- Why might that be?
- I would like to put forth to you today that there are at least 4 main factors contributing to this.
- And I will address them from the inside, out.

The first factor is from inside yourself.

- Pastor, no matter how hard I try, it seems like I just keep doing the things I struggle with.
- Pastor, I'm not supposed to worry.....but let me tell you, I worry.
- Pastor, my sins are piled up so high....I'm not even sure I can find my way to God.

Pastor, I do try.....but at times God seems so distant.

- I do think about Bible study.....but somehow, something seems to get in the way with that.
- Sometimes we can be discouraged, downtrodden, and disappointed from within.
- Our own sinful nature pressing down on us.

The second factor, and moving again from the inside, out.....

- Can be the church itself.
- Pastor.....it is tough for me to get here every week.
- Pastor....it is tough for me to pay attention and get what I should out of the whole service.

- Pastor.....It's tough for me to find and focus in on the meaning and depth of all of what goes on.
- Pastor, to be honest, .....I'm having trouble even right now. I'm acting like I'm paying attention but, to be honest, my mind is wandering to everything I have going on today.....and even all those problems I face.
- Pastor.....the church just seems to have lost some of its luster and excitement for me. Sometimes it seems monotonous. It's not new and exciting.
- Pastor.....COVID took its toll on us. We still don't have everyone back yet. And will we ever get them back?

The third factor, moves us from the church to the world.

- We live in a dark, broken, sinful world.
- Every day, it seems, nothing but problems. So much unrest.

Have you noticed the price of things?

- Gas at around \$5 a gallon. And my bill at the grocery store just keeps climbing.
- I don't know where it is going to end. I don't know if I am going to be able to keep up with the cost of things.

And Christ seems to be pushed more and more out of the picture.

- I'm not sure even how many true Christians still remain in the world.

And the final factor.

- So you want to do something about all this in the church and the world.
- But I don't even know where to start.
- And I sure don't know if I have what it takes.
- And will I really make a difference?
- I have problems even within my own family. I pray and pray about this and nothing seems to change.

Well, do you find yourself in any of those scenarios?

- Or maybe even, some combination of all of these scenarios.
- Life is not easy. There is a reason we say we are on a wilderness journey.

Well, in all of this, you are not alone.

- This is the way it has been since the fall of man in the Garden of Eden.

And we get a good example of all this in our Old Testament reading for today with Elijah.

- Not the great prophet Elijah?
- The great prophet Elijah that God took up to heaven and did not even see death?
- Yes, we see that today even in the great prophet Elijah.

Elijah had done some pretty great things for the Lord.

- He had taken part in the amazing events at Mt. Carmel as Yahweh sent fire from heaven and proved He was indeed God and Baal was not.
- And with this we have the slaughter of the prophets of Baal and even an acclamation from the people of Israel that Yahweh was indeed God.

And then came the prick that burst the bubble.

- King Ahab told his wicked wife Jezebel what had happened on the mountain.
- And Jezebel vowed to have Elijah put to death.

Elijah was no stranger to trouble. He had been on the run before.

- Throughout the whole drought preceding the Mount Carmel event, some 3 ½ years, Elijah was avoiding Ahab and Jezebel.
- And in those circumstances, Elijah continued doing the thing God gave him to do.

But this time it is different.

- Elijah was afraid.
- Elijah fled to the south.
- In the wilderness, Elijah even asked to die.
- Elijah is done.

I began this message by asking you, “How is your faith journey going?”

- At this point, Elijah, how is your faith journey going?
- Can you at times relate to Elijah?

And Elijah went and hid in a cave.

- And this is where our Old Testament reading picks up and we are told.....
- The Word of the Lord came to Elijah.
- And God asked him, “Elijah, what are you doing here?”

And now some very interesting things happen.

- First, Elijah responds to God’s question about what was he doing there?

Elijah begins by saying how jealous he had been for the Lord. In essence, how much he has done for the Lord.

- Elijah, it seems, has turned this all in on himself. What he had done.
- Go back and look at his response in our Old Testament reading.
- He talks about himself.

And then he continues on.

- And he said the children of Israel are now against Yahweh.
- An exaggeration. “The children of Israel” would mean all people of the northern and southern kingdoms. At best, Elijah’s work had been in the northern kingdom.

And that use of the word. “ALL the children of Israel.”

- Elijah was saying he was the only one left.
- Just prior to this the prophet Obadiah had told Elijah that there were 100 priests of God.

And he continued his exaggeration. He said all these people had killed your prophets and thrown down your altars.

- Actually, that had all been done by the wicked Queen Jezebel.

And God tells Elijah to go out and stand on the mount before the Lord.

- And then we are told 4 events take place.

A great and strong wind came. So strong it tore the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks.

- A reminder of the strong wind that had separated the Red Sea so the children of Israel could cross it.
- But we are told the Lord was not in the wind.

And then after the wind, there was an earthquake.

- A reminder of the quaking that took place on Mt. Sinai when the children of Israel were there after the exodus from Egypt. The same mountain Elijah is now on.
- But we are told the Lord was not in the earthquake.

And then after the wind and the earthquake, there was a fire.

- A clear reminder to Elijah of what just weeks before had taken place on Mount Carmel when it was clearly shown that Yahweh, and not, Baal is God.
- But again, we are told the Lord was not in the fire.

And now, after all this, the sound of a low whisper.

- Why did Yahweh have Elijah go through all these experiences with the wind, the quaking and the fire and then show Himself in the low whisper?
- I think the Lord is teaching Elijah and us that God, when He chooses, can deal with the people through awesome displays of His might and His majesty.
- Yet God's usual way of operating is through the quiet, gentleness, of His Word.
- We need to look for God not in the spectacular; but in the quiet and calmness and gentleness of His Word.

And He speaks to Elijah.

- You remember when I started this message and I identified 4 factors that cause us to despair and fall from God?
- In the gentle whisper to Elijah, God addresses each of these factors.

We talked about self.

- Elijah had turned in on himself.
- He felt sorry for himself and was depressed. He was disappointed because he had put it all on his own shoulders.

And God told him to get up and go and return to the WILDERNESS.

- And He would be with him.
- Elijah had cut himself off from the fountains of strength.
- Elijah had went from trusting in the Lord to his own strength.
- We dare not do this. And for when we do, we need to return to the Lord.

The second factor we looked at was the church itself.

- Elijah said he was the only one left.
- Later in our text God tells Elijah that there are 7,000 left whose lips have not kissed Baal.
- And he tells him he will give to him Elisha as a prophet to anoint in his place.

Dear fellow saints at Hope.....

- You are not alone. Yes, there are plenty of seats available for more to be in church, but God has promised to give us everything we need to be successful.
- Successful that is, most importantly, as God defines successful.
- And we have one another to encourage and help and strengthen each other.

The third factor was the world.

- And God directs Elijah to put in place those actions for changes in kingship.
- That is, God is still in control in the world. YES EVEN TODAY.
- And He even can and will work through the evil in this world for good things to happen in accordance with His will.
- Do not lose heart. God will provide. God will always remain in control.

And the final factor was the discouragement when others, including loved ones do not turn to Christ.

- We dare not lose heart here either but carry on.
- We dare not hide in a cave but go out and proclaim Christ.
- “So is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.” Isaiah 55:11.
- Our job is to proclaim Christ. It is the Holy Spirit that will do the conversion.

George Muller was a Christian man.

- He had 5 friends who were not Christians that he decided to place his focus on to bring them to Christianity.
- He began praying for these 5 men.

After many months, one of them came to the Lord.

- Ten years later 2 others were converted.
- It took 25 years and then the 4<sup>th</sup> one was converted.

George Muller continued to persevere in prayer until the time of his death for his fifth friend.

- Throughout the 52 years that passed, he never gave up hope for the man becoming a Christian.
- His faith was rewarded.
- Soon after Muller’s funeral the last one also became a Christian.

We walk by faith and not by sight.

- Who of us have not taken an eye test at the optometrist’s?

- Sometimes we have trouble seeing up close, sometimes further away. Sometimes both.

I wonder what Elijah and our eye check up would show for what we see through the eyes of faith.

- We need to be sure we see and walk with Jesus.
- Elijah had become focused in on himself and even the spectacular as the world would see it.
- Wind, earthquake and fire.

But God came in the quiet whisper of His Word.

- Do you see Jesus here today? And do you draw strength to continue on?
- Just as with Elijah, He is whispering to you today.

He has done that in His Word.

- He will soon do that in His very body and blood in Holy Communion. Food for the journey.
- And He does that with your fellow church members here today.
- Christ also speaks to us, gently and quietly in the words of one to another.

How is your faith journey going? How are you doing in walking with Jesus?

- No matter where you are at, including hiding in a cave, Jesus is quietly speaking to you, watching over you, and giving you the strength for the journey.
- Just as He did with Elijah, when God asks what you are doing here.....how will you answer?

Just as we invite others to see Jesus, we need to see Him also.

- Jesus is whispering life and strength to you this day.
- Amen.

(Please stand) And now, may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Having heard the Word of God we now prepare our hearts and minds to confess together the words of the Nicene Creed as found on page 206 in your hymnal.