

# "Not Our Home"

1 Kings 19:4-8

May you forever be "at home" with your Savior-God, here in time and hereafter in eternity. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians:

Americans increasingly have no time for fine, detailed work. We seem to have thrown out all of our little brushes and have kept only the big, wide, fat ones. We're obviously speaking metaphorically here about what they call the "broad brush" approach to the questions or problems of life. What that means is that we love the "one size fits all" answers, rules, and solutions. We long to be able to see every question as rigidly binary - black and white, right or wrong. We have grown so sick of the new PC rules of life, conduct and speech that we are now arguably in danger of swinging too far in the opposite direction – almost to a *"If it's bad, shoot it"* and *"If it's wrong, crush it"* kind of worldview.

While the overreaction is of course understandable, it's typically not an option that God offers to his children. We are in the salvage business, not the vengeance business. As always, we take our cue from Jesus, who always struck the perfect balance. It's silly to imagine that sexual immorality wasn't a serious problem among the Jews of Jesus' day. Don't you suppose it would have been tempting for Jesus therefore, when confronted with the woman caught in the act of adultery, to make a statement against this great societal evil by just letting the crowd do what the Law of Moses called for them to do, which was to stone her to death? Or do you imagine that Jesus wasn't aware of all the evil (past, present, and future) to be carried out by the Roman government, and that he wasn't therefore also tempted to tell his people that they no longer had to "support" such evil by paying their taxes? Jesus instead used the fine, detail brush when he taught them to forgive the repentant woman, but told her to **"go and sin no more"**; when he told the people to **"render to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's."** Jesus never justified sin, but he did show unwavering concern for the human soul caught up in sin. While advocating respect to the governing authority, he always framed that respect in the context of obedience to God, the ultimate authority. He kept the law perfectly, but he also demonstrated the role of, and need for, the law of love.

Clearly this is fine, detail work where nothing but the steadiest hand will do. It's an art form, and just one more reason why Christians need to pray

for Godly wisdom and discernment every single day. This is the direction from which we will approach our text for this morning, found in the Book of 1 Kings, the 19<sup>th</sup> Chapter:

<sup>ESV</sup> **1 Kings 19:4-8** *But he (Elijah) himself went a day's journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he asked that he might die, saying, "It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers." <sup>5</sup> And he lay down and slept under a broom tree. And behold, an angel touched him and said to him, "Arise and eat." <sup>6</sup> And he looked, and behold, there was at his head a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water. And he ate and drank and lay down again. <sup>7</sup> And the angel of the LORD came again a second time and touched him and said, "Arise and eat, for the journey is too great for you." <sup>8</sup> And he arose and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mount of God.*

So far our text. In thanks to our Lord for this gift of his Word, and in humble acknowledgement of its depth, wisdom, and inerrancy, so we pray, **"Sanctify us by Your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth!"** Amen.

Let me begin with a question to help you understand where we're headed here: *What do you think of the current trend in our society where a significant percentage of adult men and women move back home to live with their parents after college, after losing a job, or after failing in their marriage?*

My guess is that if you've had either no experience or negative experience with this sort of thing, your tendency would be to grab the broad brush and to paint the whole thing black – as in: *"What a disgrace. It just shows how lazy and unprincipled young people are today and how parents are coddling their children."*

Quick and easy answer, but then what do you do with the fact that 50-100 years ago, especially in agricultural societies, that sort of thing was the rule rather than the exception? Whole families would live together under the same roof, all sharing in the work of running the farm, ranch or business. Parents would care for their children when young, and the children would then care for their parents when old.

Well, that's different, of course. But that's the whole point, isn't it? Very few elements of our lives lend themselves to the "one-size-fits-all" approach. Life tends to be a myriad of fine lines that require great care

and attention to detail – which is not to say that generalities never apply. One such that we look at this morning in this context is the general rule that *"You can never go home."* The fact that there are exceptions to this rule doesn't change the fact that the rule still applies in the vast majority of cases. I'm guessing that the majority of adults here know exactly what we're talking about. Something indescribable and permanent happens the moment you move out of your parents' home. That exact "home" or relationship changes forever. Even if circumstances in life make it necessary or even just prudent for adults to physically move back in with their parents, what they invariably discover is that the "home" that they remember no longer really exists.

This is the general rule that we need to apply to our text for this morning, because in examining our text from this perspective we will learn something not only about our text, but about our own individual walk through life. We will thereby come to recognize a vital lesson that our God offers us in this section of his Holy Word.

The setting here is important. At this point in history, Israel had for the most part given itself over to pagan idolatry – in particular the worship of Baal and Asherah. During this period the Prophet Elijah served as the rather lonely voice of God in a very ungodly society. Just prior to the events of our text, Elijah had arranged a pivotal confrontation with the prophets of Baal and Asherah on Mt. Carmel. You probably remember the account of how both Elijah and the prophets of Baal were to erect altars, lay the wood and the sacrifice, and then call on their God (god) to miraculously light the sacrifice. Obviously the prophets of Baal failed miserably, but the One True God did not. Elijah then exercised the blunt force trauma solution by slaughtering the prophets of Baal, and in so doing brought about what he at first must have regarded as irrefutable evidence proving the existence and power of the One True God. He undoubtedly regarded the event as a lasting purge of the evil of idolatry in Israel. His optimism was short-lived.

Immediately after this great demonstration of God's power, Queen Jezebel vowed to take Elijah's life. Terrified and no doubt more than a little bewildered, Elijah fled for his life into the wilderness. It is at this point that our text takes up the story.

We miss the main point of this story if we fail to ask and answer two key questions, the first of which is: *Where exactly was Elijah going?* The second is just as important: *Why was he going there?*

The answer to the first question is that Elijah was fleeing to Mt. Horeb. Most know the place by its other name – Mt. Sinai. Why was Elijah going *there*, of all places? To answer, we need to remind ourselves not only of the history of Mt. Sinai (what happened there) but of the symbolism that God's Word itself ascribes to it. Mt. Sinai was where God himself gave the Mosaic Law to Israel. As such, it had become "home" to the Jews – despite the fact that what they had experienced there had terrified them, and despite the fact that the Jews arrived at a profound *misunderstanding* of the events they there witnessed. They saw Sinai not only as a place where God visited them but as a place where he demonstrated his power. Remember that at this point in history, mankind had something of a local or geographical concept of God; that is, they believed that God (the gods) was/were more powerful in some locations than they were in others. Disheartened and disillusioned, Elijah was returning to what he undoubtedly regarded as God's stronghold – the place where God wielded his influence and authority most powerfully. Whether knowingly or unknowingly he was in fact returning to a symbolic place. God's Word describes that symbolism in Galatians 4:22-26: ***"For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and one by a free woman. <sup>23</sup> But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, while the son of the free woman was born through promise. <sup>24</sup> Now this may be interpreted allegorically: these women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar. <sup>25</sup> Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. <sup>26</sup> But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother."***

Elijah had just witnessed a remarkable demonstration of God's power – tangible, visible evidence of his supremacy over pagan idols. In the mind of man, that's how things get done. In some ways that's true, but despite all appearances to the contrary, that's not how things work when it comes to matters of faith. Man can be terrified and intimidated by outward demonstrations of power, but man is seldom changed on the inside by such things. There a different power needs to be applied.

Elijah's flight to Sinai is essentially a doubling down on the way Elijah believed things got done. If Jezebel wanted to take his life, then let her and her men follow him to God's seat of power, to Sinai, and there let them see God's raw, unfiltered supremacy. There, if nowhere else, God would be able to protect him.

Remember what happened next? Elijah made it to Sinai and there informed God that he was the last true believer on earth. Remember

God's response? ***And (God) said, "Go out and stand on the mount before the LORD." And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. <sup>12</sup> And after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire the sound of a low whisper.*** (1 Kings 19:11-12)

Man imagines that "might makes right." While that's true, man's natural problem is that he doesn't always recognize true might when he sees or hears it. God's ultimate desire is not to kill and destroy but to convert and save. One day Elijah would go home – in the whirlwind accompanied by the fiery chariot – but Sinai was not his home. Nor was it God's home. God once gave the Mosaic Law there, but that Law was given for a very specific purpose, and that purpose was never to save. Make no mistake; there was nothing wrong with the law. It was not the law that failed man, but man that failed the law. Had man kept the law perfectly, he would have forever enjoyed God's protection and blessing. The Jews however came to believe that they could earn heaven for themselves by keeping God's law. They made that place their spiritual home and refused to leave. God demonstrated the foolishness of that misguided trust to Elijah. The true greatness and power of God is most clearly seen in his ability to rescue fallen sinners. It is to save, not to destroy. It is to demonstrate mercy, not to force into outward subjection.

Carry this lesson forward. You and I today look around and we see evil prospering on every hand. Evil is not just tolerated, it is flaunted, paraded, praised. Evil is lauded as good, and good as evil. The inevitable result will naturally be frustration on the part of God's children, along with the desire to opt for Elijah's solution. *"Why does God continue to allow evil to exist and to prosper? Why doesn't God put an end to it? Why doesn't God bare his mighty arm and simply crush such obvious wickedness?"* Followed through to its logical end, what we are really saying is *"Why doesn't God just send the unbelievers to hell right now?"*

The answer, of course, is that God doesn't desire the death of the wicked. He wants them saved, *as he has already rescued you and me.* That's why God did not give us the consuming fire from heaven; he gave us the low, quiet whisper of the gospel. That's where the power is – the only power that can save, rather than destroy. How easy, how natural, and yet how sinfully wrong to allow our hearts to move back to Sinai – to be filled with hatred for the godless and the desire for their destruction, rather than love for their souls.

You and I were not saved by the wind, the earthquake, or the fire that Elijah saw on Sinai, nor by the law once given there. We were saved by that incredibly powerful ***"low whisper"*** that is the gospel. It was through that ***"low whisper"*** that God the Holy Spirit rescued our souls from the eternal destruction we had earned because of our sin and unbelief. That ***"low whisper"*** carried to our hearts the simple truth that God does not now demand that we save ourselves through our own perfection. He instead demanded that perfection from his Son, in our place. Jesus alone fulfilled every demand of Mt. Sinai. That same incredibly powerful ***"low whisper"*** now assures us that Jesus' perfection is ours because of the faith and trust that God himself has created and preserves in our hearts.

Why would anyone ever want to go back "home" to the terror of Mt. Sinai and the *impossible* demands of that place? An even better question this morning: *Why would any child of God, having once experienced the power and love of that "low whisper," desire anything less for those poor souls that currently call Sinai home?* Amen.

## **Scripture Readings**

<sup>ESV</sup> **Ephesians 4:30 - 5:2** And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. <sup>31</sup> Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. <sup>32</sup> Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. ¶ Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. <sup>2</sup> And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

<sup>ESV</sup> **John 6:41-51** So the Jews grumbled about him, because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." <sup>42</sup> They said, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, 'I have come down from heaven'?" <sup>43</sup> Jesus answered them, "Do not grumble among yourselves. <sup>44</sup> No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day. <sup>45</sup> It is written in the Prophets, 'And they will all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me-- <sup>46</sup> not that anyone has seen the Father except he who is from God; he has seen the Father. <sup>47</sup> Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. <sup>48</sup> I am the bread of life. <sup>49</sup> Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. <sup>50</sup> This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. <sup>51</sup> I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."

# ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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**The 12<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost – August 12, 2018**

## The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

## The Opening Hymn – 1 (Red Hymnal)

"Open Now the Gates of Beauty"

## The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

## The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

**The Epistle Lesson:** (Ephesians 4:30 – 5:2) It is not always wrong to do the right thing with ulterior motives. It depends, of course, on what that ulterior motive is. Since we are divinely appointed representatives of our Savior-God, everything that Christians do reflects back upon that God. That means that while Christians, according to the new man, want to do the right thing (just for the sake of doing the right thing) we also want our actions to draw others to their Savior. One of the most powerful reflectors is forgiveness – ours reflecting Christ's.

## Psalm 23 (Supplement page 36) (Brown Hymnal) (Read Responsively)

**The Gospel Lesson:** (John 6:41-51) Jesus here continues his march into political obscurity. In man's eyes, he says all the wrong things and alienates all the wrong people. So it is with the Word of God. God's Word is no "respector of men." It establishes truth in uncompromising and unyielding terms. Natural man always rejects the message. Thanks be to the Holy Spirit for His gift of saving faith.

## The Confession of Faith -

The Nicene Creed – page 5. (Brown Hymnal)

## The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 289 (Red Hymnal)

"The Law Commands and Makes Us Know"

## The Sermon – Text: 1 Kings 19:4-8 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

**"Not Our Home"**

## The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

## The Prayers

## The Pre-Communion Hymn -307 (Red Hymnal)

"Draw Nigh and Take the Body of the Lord"

## The Preparation for Holy Communion (Brown Hymnal page 17)

## The Distribution

## The Nunc Dimittis and Thanksgiving (Brown Hymnal page 20)

## The Benediction

## The Closing Hymn -313 (Stanza 1) (Red Hymnal)

"O Lord We Praise Thee"

## Silent Prayer

**Welcome!** - We warmly welcome any visitors worshipping with us this morning and invite you to join us each Sunday at this time. We are glad you are here! **To our Visitors seeking an altar at which to commune** – Since we desire to follow the words of our Savior, we practice "Close Communion" – a practice that is not new to confessional Lutherans. This practice stresses both our concern for others, not wanting them to receive the sacrament to their harm (1 Cor. 11:27-30) and the importance of unity in confession and faith (1 Cor. 10:16-17). For this reason we ask that anyone who has not established this unity through membership in a CLC congregation please first meet with the pastor to discuss this Scriptural doctrine before communing. This is a practice that we follow out of love and concern for you, and out of obedience to God's Word.

## Attendance - Sunday (45) Average (42)

## This Week at St. Paul:

<b>Today</b>	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Worship Service w/ Holy Communion
	<b>-11:15 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship and Coffee Hour
	<b>-11:30 a.m.</b>	– Church Council Meeting
<b>Friday</b>	<b>- 5:30 p.m.</b>	– Ollenburger Affirmation Service
<b>Next Sunday</b>	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Sunday Worship Service
	<b>-11:00 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship and Coffee Hour

**CLC News** – Bethel of Morris, MN has called Pastor Mark Gullerud. Pastor Nathan Pfeiffer is considering the call to Berea of Inver Grove Heights, MN.

**Ollenburger Affirmation Service** – Loren and Cindy Ollenburger are celebrating 40 years of marriage with an Affirmation Service this Friday at 5:30 p.m. The congregation is invited to attend, along with a fellowship meal to follow.

**Outreach Committee Notes** – As a first step in reenergizing our outreach program here at St Paul, please take some time to read the booklet you will find in your mailbox entitled "Seven Habits of a Mission-minded Congregation."

**Church Council Meeting** – The Church Council is scheduled to meet this morning during the fellowship hour.

**Mexico Mission Aid** – We are gathering funds to send to Pastor Olvera in Mexico. Please speak to Pastor Roehl for additional information.