

June 2, 2013

1 Kings 18: 20-39

Sharon is going to give us a quick summary of this passage and later, when the children join us, we will watch a short video. King Ahab and his wife Jezebel aligned themselves with the 450 Baal gods. Elijah the prophet suggests a contest between the God of Israel and the gods of Baal to prove who is the greatest. [Sharon will tell story]

²⁰So Ahab summoned everyone in Israel, particularly the prophets, to Mount Carmel.

²¹Elijah challenged the people: "How long are you going to sit on the fence? If GOD is the real God, follow him; if it's Baal, follow him. Make up your minds!"

Nobody said a word; nobody made a move.

²²Then Elijah said, "I'm the only prophet of GOD left in Israel; and there are four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal. ²³Let the Baal prophets bring up two oxen; let them pick one, butcher it, and lay it out on an altar on firewood—but don't ignite it. I'll take the other ox, cut it up, and lay it on the wood. But neither will I light the fire. ²⁴Then you pray to your gods and I'll pray to GOD. The god who answers with fire will prove to be, in fact, God."

All the people agreed: "A good plan—do it!"

²⁵Elijah told the Baal prophets, "Choose your ox and prepare it. You go first, you're the majority. Then pray to your god, but don't light the fire."

²⁶So they took the ox he had given them, prepared it for the altar, then prayed to Baal. They prayed all morning long, "O Baal, answer us!" But nothing happened—not so much as a whisper of breeze. Desperate, they jumped and stomped on the altar they had made.

²⁷By noon, Elijah had started making fun of them, taunting, "Call a little louder—he is a god, after all. Maybe he's off meditating somewhere or other, or maybe he's gotten involved in a project, or maybe he's on vacation. You don't suppose he's overslept, do you, and needs to be waked up?" ²⁸They prayed louder and louder, cutting themselves with swords and knives—a ritual common to them—until they were covered with blood.

²⁹This went on until well past noon. They used every religious trick and strategy they knew to make something happen on the altar, but nothing happened—not so much as a whisper, not a flicker of response.

³⁰Then Elijah told the people, "Enough of that—it's my turn. Gather around." And they gathered. He then put the altar back together for by now it was in ruins. ³¹Elijah took twelve stones, one for each of the tribes of Jacob, the same Jacob to whom GOD had said, "From now on your name is Israel." ³²He built the stones into the altar in honor of GOD. Then Elijah dug a fairly wide trench around the altar. ³³He laid firewood on the altar, cut up the ox, put it on the wood, and said, "Fill four buckets with water and drench both the ox and the firewood." ³⁴Then he said, "Do it again," and they did it. Then he said, "Do it a third time," ³⁵and they did it a third time. The altar was drenched and the trench was filled with water.

³⁶When it was time for the sacrifice to be offered, Elijah the prophet came up and prayed, "O God, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, make it known right now that you are God in Israel, that I am your servant, and that I'm doing what I'm doing under your orders. ³⁷Answer me, GOD; O answer me and reveal to this people that you are GOD, the true God, and that you are giving these people another chance at repentance."

³⁸Immediately the fire of God fell and burned up the offering, the wood, the stones, the dirt, and even the water in the trench.

³⁹All the people saw it happen and fell on their faces in awed worship, exclaiming, "GOD is the true God! GOD is the true God!"

Galatians 1: 1, 2, 6-9

This passage is also about a contest of sorts. This time it is between Paul, who brought the Christian message to the people of Galicia, and a group of Jewish-Christians who followed with a different story. Paul is enraged at how they are being drawn to what he considers false teaching. For Paul, the proof of God's pre-eminence is to be found in the cross of Jesus. The empty cross of resurrection is a miracle like the burning of the soaked wood in our first reading. Listen to this message of faith.

¹⁻²I, Paul, and my companions in faith here, send greetings to the Galatian churches. My authority for writing to you does not come from any popular vote of the people, nor does it come through the appointment of some human higher-up. It comes directly from Jesus the Messiah and God the Father, who raised him from the dead. I'm God-commissioned.

⁶I can't believe your fickleness—how easily you have turned traitor to him who called you by the grace of Christ by embracing a variant message! ⁷It is not a minor variation, you know; it is completely other, an alien message, a no-message, a lie about God. Those who are provoking this agitation among you are turning the Message of Christ on its head. ⁸Let me be blunt: If one of us—even if an angel from heaven!—were to preach something other than what we preached originally, let him be cursed. ⁹I said it once; I'll say it again: If anyone, regardless of reputation or credentials, preaches something other than what you received originally, let him be cursed.

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the church.

Thanks be to God!

Sermon – "God is not interested in popularity contests"

We love contests/competitions.

I found a list of 104 game shows/talent searches on TV since the 1950's.

- Truth or Consequences
- Deal or No Deal

- Survivor
- Star Search
- Dancing With the Stars – to name just a few

We've all grown up with spelling bees at school where we hoped to be the last one standing.

- or the person with the most badges in Brownies or Cubs
- or the athlete named to the All-Star team/or with the most trophies.
- Or chosen for awards at school graduation
- Or promotion at work

We seem to be bred for competition

By contrast, God is NOT interested in "winning" our faith.

Elijah's God doesn't play the game with Baal – God has nothing to prove – God is not "making a case".

The consuming fire is God's only word – a definite statement rather than an argument.

Paul does little more than hold a cross before the Galatians and suggests they figure out the obvious.

U.S radio hosts and political commentator Tammy Bruce recently observed:

Trials are no longer about freeing the innocent, punishing the guilty, and making restitution to the injured. They have devolved into a contest over who will win.

Faith in contrast, is not about winning.

Thus it means to step away from our culture of competitiveness to discover a new belief that grounds us – the truths that guides us – the hope that sustains us.

Paul's observation of the Galatians who thought the Jewish-Christian charismatic teachers were pretty enticing is no different from one made centuries later:

We are a puny and fickle folk. Avarice, hesitation, and following are our diseases. *Ralph Waldo Emerson quotes.*

So, why come to the church?

- Don't come for the brilliant sermons
- Don't come for the great technology
- Don't come because of ... ?

Faith is not a race or a competition – you don't win but you will certainly be blessed if you trust in the truth of God in Jesus – maybe not good TV BUT good living!