

Dublin Community Church

6/24/01

Much is expected of us. We have not been sent into this theater of the soul to watch passively. We are not the audience but the players in this drama, writing our parts as we go, so that we might learn something -- both as individual souls, and together as the fragile web of consciousness that sparkles over God's creation. It is all evolving, we hope, toward some unity with the Divine.

This life is not a test or a drill or an accidental light opera: Much is expected of us. Some days it is quite too much indeed. Some days everything we love is suddenly gone, or has turned against us. We look at our life and our meager accomplishments and we sense that the game is lost; the play has run; we have no more to give; we have no interest in fighting on.

So it was, so many centuries ago, when Elijah sat down to die under a desert broom tree. His own fear had chased him into the wilderness. He had fought

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hard and well against the enemies of the Lord, but the altars of his beliefs lay in ruins and he was the lone prophet facing heartbreaking work ahead. He had fought so long and given so much strength to his calling that there seemed nothing left inside him. When Jezebel threatened his life, he broke and ran.

And any young person who has tried to do well in school or on the field, and any parent who has tried to be saint and provider to a family knows Elijah well, as do I. We have often sat down with old Elijah under that desert tree, just wishing it were over.

As Elijah slumbers under the tree, the Lord sends an angel twice to nourish him with bread and water and encouragement. "Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you," said the angel. The Lord did not send solutions to Elija's problems —only enough sustenance so that the show might go on. For much was expected of Elijah, as much is expected of each of us.

Deep in a cave, which is where we indeed go when we have had enough, Elijah listened to the voice in him that he knew to be the voice of the Divine. He prepared himself for the approach of the Divine itself. The wind blew until the mountain nearly fell in around him –the rocks crashing into bits. Then the earth rumbled and a great earthquake rolled Elijah in his cave. But he did not feel the presence of the Divine in those signs, just as we do not feel much but fear and horror as our world crumbles around us. But then a whisper: Elijah felt the presence of God in a gentle whisper. God asks him what he is doing there. God certainly knows the answer, but Elijah needs to remind himself who he is and what his work is. And so God makes him say it aloud. "I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken 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." Ah, Elijah remembers: That's who I am. That

is what I am about. I can do this, even if it kills me to do it.

You may have said aloud in the privacy of that little cave called your car: "I am a parent of two teenagers. They both hate me and they do the opposite of whatever I say and I am terribly worried for their safety and their futures. I must express love instead of anger, yet I am screaming inside and incredibly lonely in this work. I am exhausted." Well, yes, Elijah, life is tough all over. It is supposed to be, or we shouldn't learn a thing and our souls might not grow an inch deeper or wider, as they must.

Much, indeed is expected of us. But we shall always be given enough bread and water and encouragement to struggle through, if we will but rest under the Lord's tree. And a whisper may come to us, to remind us who we are and what work we have come here to do.

It is no secret among my friends in this church that, when my husband, Jim, and then my good friend, Elizabeth, died, I was quite depressed. God did not forget about me. He kept my son Jim and my daughter-in-law Libby at my side to give me encouragement and sustenance.

And there was a whisper in my ear --you may have heard me tell the story: Jim was driving me down to visit my sister in Florida. Along the road, as we sped by, was an old traveling man out in the middle of nowhere, just standing there. Soon, he was far behind us.

"Well, Doris", he nevertheless whispered, "what are you doing here?"

"Well, Sir, I have become an old woman. My husband and my dear friend are dead, but my son --as you can see-- and my daughter are alive. I used to travel with my husband as we journeyed far to help where we

thought we could be useful. We drove to Alaska to stop atomic testing, you know." The old man knew.

And in saying it all, I remembered whom I was, and I saw that there was still a great deal of work for me to do. And who cares if it kills you, if doing it is your business on this earth.

And so the questions and queasiness that I had been struggling with, looking for a way to express my concern for our democracy—so polluted as it is by big, special interest money—came suddenly into focus. I stepped out of the cave of my depression and began to plan my work—my job.

I decided to go on the road to talk to people about our democracy, and what we might do to help it survive. Every door opened to me. My every thirst was quenched, every hunger satisfied. Whenever I needed a special kind of person for the work at hand, they appeared as if by magic. When it rained too

hard, there was some earthly angel with a great, plastic tarp to walk with me. When the snow was too deep for walking, a beautiful ski path, over 100 miles long, presented itself. You must never doubt that you will be given what you need for this show to go on, once you accept the idea of who you are and what you must do.

Much is expected of us, but everything necessary is given us, if we but have faith in the Divine importance of our lives.

We have hard work to do in this life, and it can get very discouraging. It is hard work, loving each other, helping each other, protecting the people and the ideas we care about, preserving nature, helping the millions of people who need our help, taking care of our own needs. It is hard work. Let us meet from time to time under Elijah's old tree and rest our bones. God will give us what we need to carry on.