

I am amazed at how quickly we forget the blessings of God. I read Psalm 78 this past week and noted these verses, each coming after the Psalmist has reminded Israel of how God has blessed them.

* Following water gushing from the rock in the desert, ***“But they continued to sin against him; rebelling in the desert against the Most High. They willingly put God to the test by demanding the food they craved”*** (17-18 NIV)

* Following the manna providing them food each day, ***“In spite of this they kept on sinning, in spite of his wonders, they did not believe”*** (32 NIV)

* As the Psalmist recounts the miracles in Egypt and the desert, ***“But they put God to the test and rebelled against the Most High; they did not keep his statutes”*** (56 NIV)

Why do we have such short memories – why the “What have you done for me lately” syndrome?

Elijah is fresh from a victory over the priests of Baal. The drought that has also plagued the land has ended. God is blessing and what does Elijah do? He goes on the run. Word has come that Jezebel is not happy with Elijah and is seeking his life. Now, he has just defeated 450 priests of Baal and he is running away from one angry woman! Goes for 40 days and nights away from her presence—out of danger.

Could God not protect Elijah from Jezebel? Why run? Elijah has the syndrome that we mentioned, “What have you done for me lately, God?” God has been with Elijah but that was yesterday. What about today? This is basically Elijah’s complaint on the mountain. “Look what I have done for you, God!” “I have been zealous, faithful and obedient to the covenant. I am the only one who would stand up and be counted. And now I am alone. There is no one who is willing to stand with me. Yes, God, you were with me yesterday, but this is today.”

As we move on to our New Testament lesson we find Jesus encountering a Gentile who is known as a demonic. The man has been exiled from the community. No one wants to be with him or near him. They have tried to chain him and he breaks the chains. He cannot be clothed (Mark 5). They have done all they could do and so they have left him on his own to live among the tombs. He can be heard yelling in the night. He cuts himself with sharp stones. He has no community. No friends. No family. He is left to himself.

Jesus arrives and the first person he encounters is the demonic. Imagine arriving in a place and being confronted by a naked man who is out of his mind. We were walking down one of the streets in Amsterdam and my aunt came up and said, “Can we walk faster? There is a man following me.” And as she grabbed my arm and started walking faster she added, “And, he is naked!” A quick turn around confirmed her statement. We moved away much faster! However, the confrontation is not what the man expected. Normally people would run from his presence. Jesus does not run but stands up to the

confrontation. Someone greater than the demons is there. The power of Jesus is recognized. "Get away from us!" He sends the demons into a herd of pigs – 2,000+ head into the sea.

The news travels. The people come to see what has happened. They find the man in his right mind. Sitting, talking with Jesus and the disciples. They are afraid. How has this happened? Their income has been lost and they are afraid. They beg Jesus to get back in the boat with his disciples and leave. They cannot handle what is happening.

The man wants to travel with Jesus. It is easier than going home. Jesus says, "no." He instructs the man to go back home and tell his family what has happened. The man's story needs to be told. If he had just left, who knows what stories might have been circulated. He died. He ran away. No, his family, his community needs to see him restored and made whole.

Now, how do we connect these two stories? Look at the direction both Elijah and this demonic receive, "Go back." Go home and tell the stories. Their stories need to be told. Elijah is told to return and bring a message. He is asked to confront the situation. There is still work that needs to be accomplished, even in the midst of dangerous situations. And, Elijah, you are not alone. There are others who are standing with God, some 7,000. God is faithful. God is working today as God worked yesterday.

Both men are given difficult assignments from God, "trust me." Jezebel is still after Elijah. She still seeks his death. The demonic has his past. What if this is only temporary? What if he mind snaps again. Who would feel comfortable around him? It is easier to stay among strangers than return back to a community who knows his past. The direction from Jesus is for him to go and tell his story.

I remember growing up that news of our misdeeds always traveled home faster than we did. Amazing that in an age without computers, cell phones, facebook and twitter news always reached home before we did. We would often linger longer playing with friends. Why hurry home when we know they already know.

Both of these men are given instructions to go and tell their stories. Think about it. How would we know of Elijah's encounter with God at Mount Horeb had he not told the story? Who else would have known the sequence of events? His running away. The wind, fire and earthquake? And, who but Elijah could explain or describe, "*the sound of sheer silence*"? We have the story because Elijah told it.

God has reminded Elijah what God has done in the past. The Psalmist reminded the Israelites of what God had done in the past. The demonic is told to go and tell the story of how he has been restored to community. The stories of God need to be told. And, as we tell the stories we are reminded of how God has moved among the lives of the people of God in the past. As we share our faith we again realize how God has moved through our lives.

We must not get caught up in the anxiousness of the moment and forget the yesterdays of our lives. We all know what God did yesterday. We have heard the stories and the stories remind us of God's faithfulness. As God was present in our lives yesterday, as God is present in our lives today, God will be present in our tomorrows. We need to move beyond the "What have you done for me lately" syndrome.

These passages remind us that we have our stories to tell and that our God is as faithful today as yesterday. And, that God's faithfulness extends to our tomorrows as well. How great is the faithfulness of our God? Listen again to your stories and the stories of others. And through it all, God will make a way.

NIV, New International Bible Society, Zondervan, 1973, 1978, 1985
NRSV, Division of Christian Education, NCC, 1989