

# Fifth Sunday of Pentecost 19 June 2016

[1 Kings 19: 1-15; Psalm 42 ; Galatians 3: 10-29; Luke 8:26-39](#) from Vanderbilt

[Proper 7C / Ordinary 12C / Pentecost +5 June 19, 2016](#) Textweek

Once again, like last Sunday, we have two ancient and fairly well known stories and some more teaching from the porridge of Paul. And all three readings as we look at them beyond the literal storylines are relevant to us, for they give us an opportunity to tune in to our own struggles and our own life questions.

Today's stories give us a reference point, or a background in relation to the whole process of wrestling with change; they give us an opportunity to pause and to seek our own place in the process of change.

- Should Britain leave the European Union?
- Is the "National Economic Plan" a way forward for Australia?
- What would a Donald Trump presidency mean for the world?
- Does the killing of fifty people in an Orlando nightclub suggest any changes might be required?
- Has Facebook and Microsoft brought about changes in how we relate to the world?

All these, and 1001 other questions that we constantly ask, open our eyes to the changes taking place in the world; they create a complex turbulence, like a storm at sea, and so often fill us with fear as we seek to sail across the ocean of life.

Today's readings provide two individual accounts that echo that very same fear and the struggle we have to find ourselves and the part we play in the ever changing landscape of life.

Elijah, like us, is confronted with the rise of secularism; the prophets have been killed with the sword, no longer is the Church a voice of influence in the world, and those who still want to hold on to their primitive faith are in danger of losing their lives. Elijah sees no future in the path he had followed;

"It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life, for I am no better than my ancestors."

I've met Elijah in the parish, when I asked someone how they were they gave an Elijah response "I'm just waiting to die".

For all of us there is much to contemplate from Elijah's struggle; and his first movement gives insight into the process, it is a movement of letting go and of emptying; "*he left his servant there*". Then "*went a day's journey into the*

*wilderness*"; he removed himself from the noise and distractions of all around him, and he then lets go of all that is past, *"I am no better than my ancestors."* Only then can Elijah enter the dreamscape of sleep and so enter another reality.

In that solitary place he receives food for the flood that will bring about a new creation: *"He got up, and ate and drank; then he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights"*. The echo of the flood story alerts us to a story of recreation, a drama of change and Elijah now enters into that same drama and it takes him to the place of resurrection; after forty days and forty nights *"he came to a cave, and spent the night there."*

Here in the cave, the tomb of Easter, he again engages God, and the Divine becomes his reference point for change, and the process of change is illuminated for us. *"Go out and stand on the mountain"*; lift your perspective from the everyday to higher things.

We then have the drama of *"a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces"*; followed by an earthquake and a fire; all signs that earlier primitive systems associated with God.

But it is in finding the silence, the Word of God without noise, that Elijah discovers a whole new insight into life, the world and his part in the whole. It is from this new enlightenment that Elijah can return to face the world with a strength that is no longer driven by his previous fear of death.

Now let's look at the struggle of another individual, and see that same struggle played out again.

The demoniac, the naked madman might readily evoke all that drives us mad; behind the literal, we see a man unaware of his nakedness; just like all those who clothe themselves with nothing; dressed only in the pretence of 'looking good but going nowhere'. And we see a man living among the tombs, living with the endless television repeats, the emptiness of busy shopping malls, and no longer connected with a living community; he could almost be an icon of 21<sup>st</sup> century humanity waiting to be healed by Jesus.

However this is more than a miracle story of healing the demoniac, for that understanding does not take into account his name, nor does it account for the herd of swine.

Consider the parallels with Elijah and again we find an individual struggling with life and seeking to discover life's fullest expression.

Naked and alone among the tombs, like Elijah he has let go of everything, he is separated from community and he resides in the tomb of Easter, the place of resurrection.

Like Elijah he was no longer constrained by the everyday powers for we hear;  
"he was kept under guard and bound with chains and shackles, but he would break the bonds and be driven by the demon into the wilds."

The "Legion" of demons are the echoes of all that has driven him away, driven him out of community; and the community of course now have a reference point to give them their own sense of righteousness, we are not like him.

Already we might now begin to glimpse some other realities that this story represents; those who are marginalised and those who are discriminated against, who do not fit in with the primitive norms of society; for they too are demonised and often sent to off-shore detention centres that offer nothing more than a life among the graves of humanitarianism.

In his struggle, in his aloneness and in his madness he is however able to recognise the reality of Jesus, he is able, like Elijah to discern the Divine.

The ask that the demons might enter the herd of swine, is return of all that had corrupted the man back to the community, a herd of the lowest of the animals, and that is the community that will succumb to the flood, they are drowned, illustrating that which is not part of life's re-creation.

Now, what happens when the people, the community that isolated him in the first place come out and find "*the man from whom the demons had gone sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind*"?

It is the same when the two major parties are confronted by an independent 'in his, or her, right mind'; and the same when we are confronted with the reality of Christ-likeness that confronts our own way of living and highlights for us where we are out of integrity; "*they were afraid*".

Once again like Elijah there is no magical ending, these are not Hollywood stories, the demoniac, now in his right mind "*begged that he might be with him; but Jesus sent him away, saying, 39 "Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you."*"

Both these stories are not miracles that give an individual salvation; rather they identify the movement of change that enables us to give voice to the Divine **in the world.**

Paul discovered this very same process; *"Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. 24 Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith. 25 But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, 26 for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith."*

And that change, in the silence of the cave for Elijah, in the recognition of Christ revealed for the demoniac, frees us from the tomb of life's primitive prejudice. it enlivens us into a much fuller, and higher life perspective; a perspective that every faith has yet to realise;

*"There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus."*

Peter Humphris

*East Coker (excerpt from Four Quartets)*

I said to my soul, be still, and let the dark come upon you  
Which shall be the darkness of God. As, in a theatre,  
The lights are extinguished, for the scene to be changed  
With a hollow rumble of wings, with a movement of darkness on darkness,  
And we know that the hills and the trees, the distant panorama  
And the bold imposing facade are all being rolled away—  
Or as, when an underground train, in the tube, stops too long between stations  
And the conversation rises and slowly fades into silence  
And you see behind every face the mental emptiness deepen  
Leaving only the growing terror of nothing to think about;  
Or when, under ether, the mind is conscious but conscious of nothing—  
I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope  
For hope would be hope for the wrong thing; wait without love,  
For love would be love of the wrong thing; there is yet faith  
But the faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting.  
Wait without thought, for you are not ready for thought:  
So the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the dancing.  
*T S Eliot (1888 – 1965)*