Spirituality
Pencil Preaching





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August 7, 2021
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“An angel touched him and ordered him to get up and eat” (1 Kgs 19:6).

Nineteenth Sunday of the Year

1 Kgs 19:4-8; Ps 34; Eph 4:30—5:2; John 6:41-51

The phrase “reluctant prophet” is redundant since most of the prophets hesitated and even resisted the call from God’s to proclaim the Word. Isaiah insisted he was unworthy, so an angel had to touch his lips with a hot coal to purify them. Jeremiah said he had been seduced into service and complained that the Word was an unbearable “fire in my bones.” Jonah ran away and had to be retrieved by a giant fish and delivered to Nineveh. Elijah, in today’s first reading, tells God to end his life, so exhausting and dangerous were his prophetic assignments. Moses said the same, telling God he could no longer bear the faithless people he had been called to lead out of Egypt.

The only prophet who lived up to the name was Jesus, yet even he waited until the last year of his life to begin his ministry. He spent 30 years in Nazareth so ordinary his own relatives and neighbors were shocked and suspicious when he suddenly emerged as an eloquent preacher and miracle worker. Was he procrastinating all those years? It appears not, for once the Spirit roused him to go and be baptized by John in the Jordan River, then into the Judean desert to contend with Satan, Jesus burst onto activity in Galilee and Judea to proclaim that the reign of God had come. Despite opposition, threats and misunderstanding, his ministry never ceased until the day he was crucified in Jerusalem.

In fact, toward the end his claims of messianic authority and divine support only increased. Jesus was not just a prophet; he was God's own son. He didn't just give bread to the crowds in the wilderness as Moses had done, he *was* the Bread of Life. Finally, he was condemned for blasphemy and handed over to the Romans as a dangerous fanatic and enemy to Caesar. Yet, his followers came to believe Jesus was no ordinary charismatic figure sent to stir up the crowds with promises of healing and freedom; he was God breaking into history itself to liberate humanity from despair, misery, violent division and paralyzing anxiety.

Jesus' witness was clear: The reign of God is at hand, in your midst, open to all who have even a mustard seed of faith. It is not an ancient dream or a future promise, but here and now, given freely to all. Anyone who seeks, knocks, and asks for God's love will receive it. What the wise and clever miss, postpone or reduce to an object of speculation, is revealed to little ones. Just step into the harness here and now with Jesus, and even your labors and suffering become a sweet burden of love and a path of joy each day, for God is in all things, everywhere, more wonderful that we can imagine. Don't be afraid, especially to believe that this is all true, for the reign of God is a Word that will come true in your hearing if you decide to live it.

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