

## **Failure Isn't Final!**

1 Kings 19<sup>9-18</sup> [Psalm 85<sup>8-13</sup>; Romans 10<sup>5-15</sup>] Matthew 14<sup>22-33</sup>

*You of little faith, why do you doubt? [Matthew 14<sup>31</sup>]*

Why are the best moments in life followed by those that, in such stark contrast, leave you feeling alone or even shaken to the core?

One of the best bits of advice I was given as a 21 year-old minister was, 'Never have Monday off. If you have a great Sunday, that's when the devil will get in!'

In the readings today we have some insight into that 'sinking' feeling where, in direct contrast to how we, or others, might expect us to feel on top of the world, that isn't our experience:

- ✘ Elijah is feeling sorry for himself after the exertions at Horeb. Having challenged the Prophets of Baal to a spiritual duel and having allowed them every chance to get their god to devour their sacrifice, he builds an altar, floods it and the area with water, tells God that his name is at stake and BANG! The sacrifice, altar and the ground were consumed in a fire that came from heaven. Having felt himself in a minority and oppressed by those who abandoned the Jewish Covenant with God, this was his vindication!

Instead of feeling elated, Elijah is exhausted and depressed and runs away. He hides, but God finds him and asks what he thinks he is doing! God has, in the verses prior to our reading, allowed him to sleep and eat and sleep and eat as a way of working through his depression. Even now, he still feels dejected – **I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away.** The greatest success in OT spiritual combat feels a failure!

Now, however, it is time to engage – there comes a **great wind, splitting the mountain; Earthquakes;** and **Fire** but God isn't in the drama! Only in the **sound of sheer silence** was God perceived. What a difficult lesson it can be for so many of us – that God is still God in the absence of activity and of noise! It was then OK for him to accept the new task from God that meant he went and brought in a new chapter by anointing a new

king and a new prophet and he could step back and pass the burden on.

- ✘ Peter had witnessed the feeding of the 5000 and then had been sent away over the Lake as Jesus needed peace and quiet to pray. In the early morning light the disciples saw Jesus coming to them on the water, even if they didn't immediately recognise him. I think I noticed when reading the passage this time, for the first time, that the text makes it clear that Jesus came to them through the storm. The disciples weren't too impressed by this apparition and Jesus had to say, **It is I, do not be afraid.**

Peter, impetuous as ever and perhaps inspired by the miracle he had witnessed in the feeding of the 5000 says, **Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.** It begins well, but then he notices the wind and sinks. The simple cry, **Lord, save me!** The response was the instant hand extended and the challenge, **you of little faith, why do you doubt?**

The storm calmed and the disciples honoured Jesus.

The message when these passages are taken together is that *Failure Isn't Final.*

Elijah hadn't failed, he was exhausted and needed time to recover – his work was done and if he hadn't recognised that he may then have gone on to fail. It is a fact that there are many faithful servants of God and his Church who are similarly exhausted or depressed and need to stop thinking of themselves as failures (because the statistics aren't better this year, or they aren't popular, or whatever) and accept the need to eat and sleep and eat and sleep and to find God in the absence of things – perhaps even to anoint successors. That isn't failure, that celebrates our calling!

Peter hadn't failed when he sank – to fail would have been a refusal to cry out to Jesus. The hand that held him above the storm is the hand that still holds us, even if there is a storm raging around us.

The faith that holds us in the worst of times is the faith that makes a difference to us and the faith that finds us in the stillness or the storm is the faith that is God's gift to us.