**Sermon “In the Storms of Life-Elijah flees from Jezebel’s wrath.”**

We’re starting the 2nd in our series “In the Storms of Life” dealing with Elijah. I wonder what picture the word Storm conjures up in your mind. For me, it is the hurricane of 1944, when I recall the roar of the wind, the sheets of rain frequently parallel to the ground, the debris flying past the sash window, where the rain oozed up from the bottom and the small double doors of the room I was in rattling ominously far too often. This assault on my senses and the fear of the disaster, if the doors flew open, left me so terrified so frequently that I was in a state of panic! Thus, in his storm, did Elijah feel with the sudden and violent threat from Jezebel.

Last Sunday, Job’s storm was the sudden, catastrophic loss of his wealth and family, while Paul, at Evensong, felt the isolation from and rejection by the Christians in Damascus and Jerusalem despite his conversion from attacking to supporting Christians. Today, Elijah suddenly realised that Jezebel’s threat to kill him was real and imminent. Also, he had the slow and gutting sense of failure-he had not achieved his main aim of restoring the worship of the Lord in the Northern Kingdom-it had fallen away to Baal worship!

The Samaritan woman’s storm was the cumulative effect of so many wrecked relationships. Did her 5 husbands die or were there divorces? If the former, she was left alone and bereaved, if the latter, a trail of bitterness, hurt and rejection. Her relationship with the villagers was also wrecked-they did not approve that the man she was now with was not her husband. They gave her the cold shoulder-hence she had to draw water at noon, whereas all the other women did that morning and evening.

In both cases, the situation was remedied, for the Lord drew near. Each was honest with Him-Elijah admitted ‘I have had enough, Lord’ 1 Kgs. 19: 4, while the Samaritan woman said ‘I have no husband’ Jn.4: 17. He had confronted them with the reality of their situations, but, because of His amazing compassion, had not written them off. He showed His support for them and even gave them a task-a new purpose. ‘Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman’s testimony… they urged him to stay with them and He stayed two days.’ Jn. 4: 39-40.

Let’s look at Elijah in more detail. There was a huge contrast between the Lord’s affirmation of Elijah on Mount Carmel and Jezebel’s chilling threat to kill him afterwards. You may recall the Lord saying to Elijah after the 3 year drought ‘go present yourself to Ahab and I will send rain in the land.’1 Kgs. 18: 1 A contest between the Baal priests and Elijah ensued. ‘…you call on the name of your god and I will call on the name of the Lord. The god who answers by fire-he is God.’1 Kgs. 18: 24 The Lord tremendously affirmed Elijah’s action by granting his prayers, firstly. ‘….the fire of the Lord fell…when all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried “the Lord He is God” ’-twice. 1 Kgs 18: 38-39-a wonderful moment in Mendelsohn’s “Elijah! Though the priests of Baal were killed, there was no reformation of Israel’s religion. Secondly, ‘…the sky grew black with clouds …a heavy rain came on.’ 1 Kgs. 18: 45.

The run up to these events was tense and utterly exhausting. Elijah had to face Ahab at the Lord’s command 1 Kgs. 18: 1. There was all the uncertainty before his prayers were answered. After these exhilarating successes he ran the 25 miles from Carmel to Jezreel, but then it was all over. He was alone and anticlimax set in. At that point, Jezebel threatened-may I suffer ‘if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of..’ the priests of Baal. 1 Kgs. 19: 2. She had already killed many of the Lord’s prophets-she had had a ferocious track record and form in her lethal hostility to the Lord’s people. Is it any wonder Elijah was panic stricken-he ‘was afraid and ran for his life.’1 Kgs. 19; 3? Ironically, the last time he ran any distance was in triumph before Ahab. After the 100 miles pelt to Beersheba, followed by a day in the desert, he had a complete collapse. It’s so vivid ‘I’ve had enough, Lord’. 1 Kgs. 19: 4 He was at the end of his tether-he was shattered physically, emotionally and spiritually. Have we not all felt like that at times after some external traumatic event?

Elijah had, also, to deal with a desperate problem within-the crushing sense of total failure. As he said ‘I am no better than my ancestors. 1 Kgs. 19: 4. His attempt to restore the Covenant and worship of the Lord in the Northern kingdom had achieved nothing. ‘The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars and put your prophets to death.’ 1 Kgs 19: 10. Despite the people’s emotional words on Carmel there was no reformation and his life’s work lay in ruins. His self confidence was gone and he said self, pityingly, “I only am left.”Have we not all experienced something like this at times?

Was there a remedy? Firstly, Elijah turned to the Lord ‘he prayed that he might die’. 1 Kgs. 19: 4 He was totally honest ‘I’ve had enough’ and ‘I am no better than my ancestors (the prophets).’ Secondly, the Lord’s answer was sleep, food and water-he was told ‘Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you.”1 Kgs. 19: 7. It was 200 miles from Beersheba to Sinai or Horeb-the site, where Moses received the original covenant. Elijah needed to tell the Lord of his failure in that place.

Thirdly,he was confronted by a question to shake him out of his despair. ‘What are you doing here Elijah?’ 1 Kgs. 19: 10. Despondently, he replied as mentioned before, so the Lord encouraged him with His presence ‘Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.’1 Kgs. 19: 11. The obvious symbols of His presence and power-the wind, earthquake and fire were not where He really was. These might have overawed Elijah into obedience. The unexpected “gentle whisper” of the Holy Spirit 1 Kgs. 19:12 was exactly what he needed to inspire, to encourage and to guide him into trust and obedience. Have not words of Scripture or from a friend or from a hymn been just what we have needed to encourage us likewise?

The Lord now questions again the newly reinvigorated Elijah-‘what are you doing here, Elijah? 1 Kgs.19: 13. He gives him two commissions and a reassurance. Retribution on the Northern kingdom is delegated to others. He should anoint-Hazael, Jehu and Elisha for that. ‘Vengeance is mine says the Lord I will repay’ Rom. 12: 9. He anointed Elisha as the prophet to succeed him-the future will be in safe hands. The reassurance comes as an answer to his querulous comment that ‘I alone am left.’ The Lord has reserved ‘7000 in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal.’ 1 Kgs. 19: 18. Does this not speak to us when in a Christian context we feel we are so weak or alone? The Lord knows and has his plans. We did not know how joining Maids Moreton might work out, but He has people there we can work with.

How will this all help us? The Storms of Life can be the sudden imminent catastrophe of Jezebel’s threat to Elijah or his sense of major failure. It might be more the cumulative wrecking of relationships that the Samaritan woman experienced. Whichever it is, we need, firstly, to turn to the Lord rather than crumble beneath the wind’s roar and the debris flying in the storm, as it were. Recall the chorus “Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in his wonderful face and the things of earth (storm) will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory (character of compassion) and grace (strength and undeserved forgiveness).”

Secondly, we need to be honest with the Lord, telling him how we feel or how the circumstances seem to us-recalling that Elijah made an implied criticism that He had not been zealous in helping him! We need to accept any wrong doing when confronted by Him. Lastly, He wants to strengthen us with the ‘quiet whisper’ of the Holy Spirit and the reassurance of His presence. Perhaps, we could claim the promise in Is. 40: 31 “They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength”. That was certainly Elijah’s experience! May it be ours, too!