

*Texts: 1 Kings 18:20-39; Mark 2:1-4*

*Subject: Elijah at Mt. Carmel*

*Theme: When God Shows Up*

*Twenty-First Sunday after Pentecost; All Saints Sunday; Nov. 3, 2019, Reformation Lutheran Church, Las Vegas, NV*

Grace and peace to you from God our father in heaven and the Lord Jesus,  
Amen.

Just down the street from my house growing up, there were a couple of really great pizza restaurants. There was Dino's, which was a nice sit-down place, dark on the inside, with the red cups, a real local favorite. Across the street was Dilulio's, which was more greasy good take out, but a fun place for us kids to hang out and get a slice and a soda. But when I was 10 or 11, Domino's pizza opened in our town. It was a big deal, and as part of their local advertising, they distributed plastic promo cups with the Domino's logo all over the neighborhood. Cars would come down the street, and fling these cups, along with pizza menus into the front yards of our neighbors. They were everywhere. It soon became a contest for my friends and I to see who could collect the most. Yes, on our bikes we'd ride around and spot the plastic cups out by the roadside, and whoever had the biggest stack was the winner.

We never hung out at Domino's. It wasn't that kind of place - they were all about delivery. The promise from this pizza chain, was that you'd get your pizza in 30 minutes or less, or it was free. On the special occasion we'd order pizza in our house, we'd just hope they'd show up at 31 minutes, and we'd get a free pie. They were usually reliable. I don't know if they still make that same promise, but if you're like me, you've grown accustomed to that process now, and now matter where you order from, you expect your pizza to show up in less than 30 minutes. We've grown even more impatient. We don't want to wait for pizza. Now you can order just about anything! We've got grub hub,

doordash, Uber eats, and more! Anything you want can come right to your home or office with the click of a mouse, or swipe of a finger on a smart phone. When we want it, we want it now.

We also get impatient with God at times.

We need God to show up when we call - to give healing and comfort, to answer prayers, to deliver on promises, to bring justice or smite our enemies, to make us happy, make us prosperous, and make us feel good. When God doesn't show up on time, or God's schedule doesn't seem to line up with ours, we can get frustrated, even angry.

“Where are you at when we need you? Where are you now, God?”

We don't like to wait. We turn to other things. We trust in what we can see, touch, control. We trust in ourselves, our fortunes, our work, our personality, the government, the prevailing wisdom, the culture, the things we know best. We think that if we could just *do something* to save ourselves - that might be better. Last week we remembered the beginning of the Reformation and the truth that we are saved not by our own works, but by God's grace alone, through faith in Christ alone. We want God to show up, but when God seems far off, we can lose faith.

In Israel, in the 10th century, Ahab was King. He married Jezebel, who brought foreign gods with her from home. She and the King worshipped the god Baal, who was understood to be the god of thunder and lightning, storms (and fertility). Baal is supposed to be the one who could control the rain, yet there was a drought for three years. While the King had his workers gather grass to feed their animals, the people starved. The prophet Elijah shows up to call out the King, and tell them to return to worship of the Lord. Elijah is a rough character - hairy, maybe a little creepy - we

remember how the people said John the Baptist reminded them of Elijah. He was doing what prophets do, speaking truth - calling out the powerful ones, at the risk of his own existence. He was the last of the prophets of the Lord, but Baal had over 450 prophets - so Elijah challenges them to see whose God will show up. They were going to find out who was "indeed God." The King had already chosen a side. The Baal prophets weren't going to convert, but Elijah was counting on God to show up in the presence of the people - so *they* would know who was "indeed God."

They got a bull and they built an altar, and set everything up just right. The Baal prophets limped around - their walk was unsteady. They called on the name of their god - and...nothing. No thunder, no lightning. Elijah taunted them:

"Where's your god at? huh? Huh? Maybe he went to use the bathroom?"

The prophets cried out, they cut themselves and bled, and still their god couldn't help them. What kind of god was this? What kind of god asks you to harm yourself? What kind of god would ask you to sacrifice your health, your body, your children?

Elijah had seen the people straying from worship of the true God of Israel, and continually called the people back to faith. After the Baal prophets spent the better part of an afternoon limping, chanting, and calling on their god, with no results, Elijah called those watching to come close. As he built an altar with 12 stones - remembering the twelve tribes, he recalled the story of Jacob's wrestling, where Israel received their name. So they would know this *was God's work alone*, and no trick, he had them put four jars of water on and around the offering, not once, but three times. He called on the God of their ancestors, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He asked God to make it known that their prayers were heard, that the promise would still come true, that

despite the pain of the past the idolatry they've witnessed and participated in, God would bring them back into the covenant relationship.

And that's when God shows up.

There was no question - the fire came down and licked up every drop of water, every sliver of wood, every bit of the sacrifice, and they knew who was 'indeed God.'

Oh - if it would be like that for us. That in our time of need, we could just call on God and the fire would rain down from heaven. In thirty minutes or less! Then the whole world would see - that we're no dummies, not wasting our time, but that our God still hears us and knows us and would believe that we *all* belong to the powerful God of the universe. Wouldn't it just be easy to be a person of faith in a culture where people worship themselves, their kings, their wealth, their bodies, their intelligence? We'd have the fire with us! Churches would be bursting with people, completely sure that the one we worship here is 'indeed God.'

But it's not like that. Most of the time. Ever, really.

We wait. We doubt. We wonder if God hears, sees, knows our needs.

Our faith is weak at times.

We seem to struggle alone.

When I think of those moments in my life when I needed God to show up, I think of my family - the ones who have gone before me - who were there for me, who spoke the promises of God over me, who called to let me know were praying for me. They embodied the love of Jesus and showed me what grace looks like. When I felt like a failure, they gave reassurance. When I needed assistance they came through. When I was afraid, they believed in me.

We can be saints for one another too, reminding each other of Jesus' words, praying the psalms, singing hymns, and speaking truth, so that we don't go limping around and crying out after the gods that don't respond, that can't help, that don't show up. We have so many saints who have gone before us, and saints among us. We don't need to put God to the test, but only to *gather around the altar, remember the story, and watch God show up.*

God showed up at the appointed time, with us, in the incarnate Word, our Lord Jesus. We can call on that name above any other name. We can be sure that the promises of God - the promises of our baptism, forgiveness, grace, mercy, and abundant and eternal life are ours. The contest has already been won, through the cross.

God shows up here - through the Word, at the table, in the meal.

All those grandmas, grandpas, pastors, teachers, parents, siblings, in the faith - they wrestled, they struggled, and they believed. They *were the fire* that came to us, to show us in their own way that God was with us, for us, and leading us in all those moments when we needed God to show up. God was working through them, and their faith in us, to show us the goodness of the Lord - the God who doesn't ask us to bleed, or kill, or suffer, but has welcomed us as beloved children already through the blood of Jesus, and is ruling still, with the resurrected and risen Jesus, and sends us the fire of the Holy Spirit.

Let us pray:

We thank you, O God, for all your servants and witnesses of times past: for Abraham and Sarah, Moses and Miriam, Deborah and Gideon, Samuel and Hannah; for Isaiah

and the prophets; for Mary, mother of our Lord; for Mary Magdalene, Peter, Paul, and for all the apostles, for Stephen and Phoebe, and for all the martyrs and saints in every time and in every land. In your mercy, give us, as you gave them, the hope of salvation and the promise of eternal life through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.