**Sermon 1 Kings 19:11-16**

INTRODUCTION

Abigail, it is tempting for all of us to think that this day is all about you. That’s because we love you and are so very excited for you and your particular call to ordained ministry in the United Church of Christ.

We know up close and personal, the work that has gone into getting to this point. The schooling, the field education, the paper writing, the going before this board and that committee, the months of mutual discernment between you and Glenview Community Church as they extended a call to you as their Inaugural Pastoral Resident, well…and possibly also the questioning of all your life choices.

Today we celebrate that you have made it to the point where we can all wholeheartedly affirm you and your call. But you know and we know that today is not actually about you. No, today is about something much more mysterious, much more profound, and intangible. Today is about the call, the persistent call of the Divine to kin-dom building.

PERSONAL APPLICATION

Abigail, your specific call to Ordained Ministry is part of this broader call to humanity. This broader call is to all, all who wish to become more human, more whole. It is to those who find the Ways of Jesus endlessly compelling, and his ancient teachings perpetually relevant and personal. Today, we celebrate the Divine call to live a life that would “let justice flow like a river, and goodness like a never-ending stream” (Amos 5:24).

Abigail today is about celebrating the work of the Sacred in and through all human beings. It is about an invisible Kin-dom to which you will spend the rest of your life testifying, a Kin-dom that stands in stark contrast to all the visible strife and hatred and selfishness and exploitation of the world. A Kin-dom where the last is first, where there is enough for all to eat with 12 baskets beside. Where there is abundant grace in mundane things like water and bread and juice, where the 99 wait while the lost and endangered one is recovered. Where death is not the end. And there is life and life abundant. And today, we celebrate the moments when the call to that vision is loud and clear.

LINK TO TEXT

But we acknowledge that there will be times, and seasons when that will not be true. Your chosen text for today, reveals that you too understand the challenges presented by responding to the call.

Our prophet Elijah knew this, felt this, experienced despair and self-doubt, fear and feelings of adequacy, a low that weighed him down enough to hope for his own death. And yet…as you so aptly titled this service…the Divine call to co-creation is The Call That Continues.

TEXT

In our text we find Elijah as the lowest point in his career. He discovers that even after all his successes, there’s still this thing called reality. And the reality is this: one victory does not mean the end of challenges. At the right time or the wrong time, with the wrong person, in the wrong situation, saying the wrong thing, acting the wrong way, you will discover that you still have moments where you will question whether saying ‘yes’ to this whole thing, was as wise as it first seemed.

And in *that* moment, when we find ourselves questioning everything……in *that* moment…we are not the ones who *find* God, but rather God finds us.

This is the Call That Continues. It is not Glenview’s Call, it’s not the Call of the United Church of Christ. It’s not a ticket to an easy life, it’s not a way to avoid mental health crises, or failures (both personal and professional). This call is bigger and more humbling than all that…and it is God’s, and God’s alone.

Now, I don’t understand it, and I want to call-the-bluff of anyone who claims to fully understand it. But I do know that, just like Elijah, you are walking an ancient path. One taken by:

Eve and Noah, Abram, and Sarai – called to roles, tasks, and places they could not never have foreseen. It’s the path of Moses and Miriam, Deborah, and Gideon - liberators and prophets of freedom and joy, when bondage and suffering and defeat and loss were every-day and ever present. It’s the path of Ruth, Rahab, and Esther - Whose time on earth, and journeys in life were not marked by visible perfection but by invisible persistence. It’s the path of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Jonah who knew that their messages would be unwelcome and unpopular, and yet the call of the Divine continued. These ancestors experienced a God who pursued them, who would not abandon them, who sought them out.

And we find that the Call of the Divine continues from the Hebrew Bible into the Christian Testament. John the Baptist and Mary the mother of Jesus, both called to prepare for something that they likely would not have chosen for themselves. The apostles and Mary Magdalene, entrusted with sharing the Good News and building new communities of faith and mutual support. To Paul and Cornelius, who witnessed the movement of the invisible Spirit of God through people and in places that few expected anything good or holy.

PERSONAL APPLICATION

And of course, the Call Continues beyond our Two Testaments, through and amongst people and communities that society had all but forgotten. God is speaking in small whispers, in labored breathing by hospice bedsides, and in noisy Godly Play lessons and in Children’s Sermons that don’t quite go to plan. In Taizé worship, moments of candle lighting, vigil holding, of protests in the halls of Capitol buildings and in rousing choral anthems. The Divine’s invisible, voiceless call can come in robes and stoles and in sneakers and T-shirts, to ordained ministry and to the laity.

Abigail today is about the communities that you have yet to serve, who are likely unaware that today is a special day for them too. It is about babies you will baptize, teenagers you will confirm, open hands where you will place bread and juice. Weddings where you will pronounce that two have become one. It is about hospital rooms unknown to you today, where you will read scripture and pray over God’s children passing from this life to the next. It is about the sacristy or some other little alcove where you will steady yourself with a deep breath each Sunday to remind yourself that it is God that breathes through you as you preach the words you know you must preach (even though you may be terrified to say them aloud.) It is about future congregations that will trust you to lead them, even when you aren’t sure what to do next.

And yet the call continues, for the call is a Divine call. Hailing from a God that will find you even when the weight of humanity’s suffering can leave you feeling un*find*able.

CONCLUSION

Abigail, today you are taking your place in a long line of mothers and fathers of our faith, ancestors that have answered a Divine call to co-create a yet invisible Kin-dom. And you are saying ‘yes’ today, as are we, knowing that we do not embark on this journey alone but with our Mysterious God who is unseen and yet ever-present.

So, until the day when all the invisible becomes visible. Abigail, remember that you are called, you are capable, you are loved. Remember that when you get it wrong, that God’s all-sufficient, whispering grace, will find you.