

## CAVE DWELLERS

After reading the passages for today, I thought “boy, a lot of people have been so busy that they will be tired and this is heavy stuff.” Plus, we have a full service with communion and the sermon will need to be brief.

I considered just putting on some soft music and so everyone could rest. And then I remembered, that Biblical messages are good nourishment for the soul,.... and.... besides, a lot of people finds sermons to be quit restful. Maybe, too restful.

So, get comfortable and we'll proceed.

Today's texts present two very different characters that similarly sought shelter in caves.

Caves are not the most pleasant or cleanest place in the world. A person would have to be pretty desperate to seek concealment there, and each of these characters were pretty desperate.

The person in the Luke passage was controlled by demons.  
There is no need to say more except the obvious: his life was a wreck!

The person in the I Kings text was Elijah. **The Prophet Elijah**, and surprisingly, his life was a wreck, too.

Their lives were a mess, everything was falling down, so they each sought seclusion in a cave—which is a vain attempt to get away from “the demons”. How they got to this point matters little. We can't rewind our lives. We can only go forward to healing or destruction. And, when all is bleak, destruction appears as the inevitable, and refuge in a cave seems to make sense.

The valley of despondency can be sharp and narrow.... pulling us into a quick descent, like Elijah's .....or it can be broad and immense, and last for years and years.

Perhaps some of us have been there.  
Maybe you have lived for a while behind closed doors.  
Maybe you wanted to hide and never speak to anyone.??  
Many good people have.

I read recently about a young lawyer who descended into the valley of despondency. Things were going so poorly for him that his friends thought it best to keep all knives and razors away from him for fear of a suicide attempt. In fact, during that dark time he wrote in his journal, “I am now the most miserable man living. Whether I shall ever be better, I cannot tell. I fear I shall not.”  
The young lawyer who unleashed those desperate feelings of utter hopelessness was Abraham Lincoln.

It can happen to the best of us, even to Elijah,.... and ...with the man in Luke,.....well we don't know much about him.

When Jesus got out of the boat in Gentile territory, there stood this man. We don't know if it was good luck,.... bad luck ....or divine intervention,.... for either person? It is hard to say.

It was a surprise! Jesus was greeted, face to face with this stark naked man who really wasn't himself. And, this afflicted, tormented man was face to face with Jesus the son of God.

The contrast was extreme. And, the demons couldn't take it, and yelled out for the torment to cease.

Jesus quickly went to the heart of the problem, and asked, "What is your name?" .....Or, in other words, who are you?  
WHO Are YOU?

We really don't know the name of the possessed person, his answer to Jesus was evidence that he had **totally lost himself**.

He didn't know himself, for he said he was the product of the possession – **LEGION**. Many demons were in control.

He had lost himself; he was being controlled.

Demons????

Dispel the gothic images of gargoyle looking demons.

Demons can be whatever we surrender to, other than God.

It can be our job, our quest for success, Our need for "things", our expectations, or our desires for approval.

Demons can be whatever possesses us other than God.

Bit by bit they can take over and cause us to lose ourselves.

We'll lose who we really are and where we should be. And, living without a "good" compass / being out of control, we may end up in our own little cave, all alone, ....without ourselves,.... watching life go by.

The story continues with the episode of the pigs.

It was a bad day to be a pig when a Jewish Messiah came visiting.

So it goes for the pigs, but more importantly, the demons were no more and the man was free. He was once lost, but thanks be to Jesus, He found himself again, and he found the grace of God.

The local people were astonished and filled with fear, so much so that they wanted Jesus to leave.

Their reaction is not surprising. We humans lust after normalcy to the point of accepting dullness and demons. We fight back when homeostasis is disrupted. We want the same old thing, even if it is ugly. And, we even consider demonstrators at the G20 as villains.

In the story, the people may have been still comfortable with their demons. It kinda works that way; it's like an addiction. They weren't ready to upset the balance. They weren't willing to just be themselves in front of the Messiah, so they forced Jesus to leave.

This is an all too common human reaction to the divine presence, including God's touch or God's work at shacking things up.

Before Jesus left, he told the new found man where he needed to be, where his **right** place was,..... and there he remained. He did the will of God.  
>His was found, he was himself, and in just the right place.

Elijah was in his valley of despondency. His life was a wreck. Queen Jezebel was out to get him. All was falling down for him, and he wanted to die. ?? What was going on with the Prophet Elijah???

Well, in verse 4, he accidentally let's it be known what had gone so wrong. He yelled out his failure, which was that he was no better than his ancestors.  
He was **no better than his ancestors**.

We don't know if he was comparing himself to Moses or just trying to live up to his father's or someone else's expectations ?

Regardless, we always lose self when we compare ourselves to others. The "Other" is either a composite of many people or an illusion, either way, the "other" is beyond truth / beyond reach.

Trying to be someone you are not is just like being possessed by demons. Reality becomes skewed,.... our vision of self is lost,... and our vision of God becomes contorted, too.

Elijah was a lost soul, so he fled to a cave to hide. Elijah had given up hope, but God had not given up hope in Elijah.

God went to his cave, and said, "ELIJAH, what are you doing here?"  
*Elijah had to confront God... because caves do not have back doors.*

Elijah was in a bad place, and it wasn't just the cave. He replied to God by moaning out, "**I've tried real hard, but the world is against me.** It's not my fault; they are the ones who are wrong and they want to kill me."

Blaming others is a clear indication that a person is out of touch with self.

Elijah was trying to be someone he wasn't, and in a place he didn't belong. Like the demon possessed man, Elijah was not himself. This is a very common possession.

Too many of us are unhappy with who we are and disappointed because we are not what we think we should be,.... and if the obsession is to be whatever it takes to please a parent,..... well it can't be done. **No, one can be what he or she is not.** Think about it.

Elijah was controlled by his self-imposed expectations that altered his self image and his image for God.

God called Elijah to **come out** of his cave / his seclusion and **to be fully exposed** on a mountain top – to experience the presence of God.

Instead of being vulnerable before God, Elijah peeked out expecting to see the grandeur of God. That was his vision for God: big, grand and flamboyant.  
{Even people in our day and age, think God is hidden in the monster events or the disasters, such as earthquakes and oil spills.}

We are told:

A great wind came and Elijah said, “yes God.”

But, God was not in the great wind.

A huge earthquake rocked the ground beneath his feet, and Elijah said, “Yes, God?”

But, God was not in the earthquake.

Then, he saw flames, but not God.

After that..... there was silence. Mind rattling silence.

Have you ever experienced complete silence where all that is heard is the buzz of your brain? It is a humbling sensation.

The Bible called it **sheer silence**.

Silence can get our attention,.... and it can leave us facing our spirit and maybe more: silence can invite us to experience God's Spirit.

Maybe that is why we clutter our lives with sound / with music in our ears or use the TV to escape. We are afraid to be **present**.

Silence can be too revealing for comfort. It can force us to look for ourselves..... and God.

From the silence, Elijah heard God, the King James Version translates the experience as “a still small voice.”

It was extremely provocative; Elijah was humbled by God's gentleness, and he came out of his cave.

Again, God pointedly asked, “What are you doing here?”

God's inquiry was Not just why, but ...**what are you doing here?**

I think Elijah was a slow learner, because again Elijah, presents his woes,.... and God listened,..... and then God tells Elijah where he needs to be: **his right place for him.**

And, ....there, the place where God sent him, Elijah discovers his mission, and that **he**, not his expectations, was exactly what was needed in just that place.  
He was right for the place where God sent him.

\*Elijah was Elijah, just what he needed to be, by the grace of God, in just the right place – the place where God had for him to be.

The message today is about finding self and about being who we really are.  
And that can't happen while blindly hiding in a cave.

Moreover, God relates and connects with each of us and not some image we have for ourselves.

God desires to connect with you and me, no matter who we are, what we've done or where we are.

God comes to us – to our spirit – God **comes for us**.  
And, God wants us to be free / to be ourselves / to be free to be ourselves.

Before his death, Rabbi Zusya said, “In the coming world, they will not ask me, ‘Why were you not Moses?’  
They will ask me, ‘Why were you not Zusya?’”

This message is for all lost souls.  
For all lost souls..... to be.... ourselves before God.

We are precious in God's sight, and God will help us find our right place,..... and it won't be in a cave.

Let us be who we really are, and by the grace of God,... we can be.

It will be okay. It will be well with our souls.

Let us pause in silence.....  
Amen.