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27JUN10 Text: 1 Kings 19:12-14 ***“And after the fire the sound of a low whisper. And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. And behold, there came a voice to him and said, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” He said, “I have been very jealous for the LORD, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away.”***

One thing that has happened in past decades in our nation is the increasing awareness toward those individuals who are handicapped. Once, those who were in wheelchairs were pretty much confined to their homes or institutions; now the disabled have a great deal of access to the world in which they live as businesses, restaurants, churches and other places provide handicap-access facilities. This congregation recognized the need for handicap accessibility to the church and in 1997 constructed the narthex addition to give access to those with physical disabilities. Yes, we have come a long, long way from those days gone by when the handicapped were called “cripples,” all the way to the point where both the physically and mentally handicapped even compete in special athletic events such as the Special Olympics.

What about those people who may be fine both physically and mentally, but happen to be “disabled” spiritually? **What access to peace and joy and contentment do those people who are spiritually disabled by discouragement have?** Our Old Testament lesson today and the verses leading up to it tell us about the prophet Elijah’s life and his case of spiritual disability brought on by his great discouragement. We’ll see that such discouragement leads a person to turn inward upon himself to a greater and greater degree and that the only help for overcoming the disability caused by such discouragement is turning to our all powerful God and the gaining from Him and His Word the proper direction we need for our lives.

Haven’t there been times in your life when you have been discouraged by a sequence of events? Usually we don’t realize at the time the degree to which we were spiritually disabled and rendered quite ineffective for any task which the LORD might have for us to do. Haven’t there been times in our lives when we look at our life and we feel like a failure, when we sense a lack of direction and purpose in life? We have asked questions like, “*What’s the use, anyway?*” or “*Why did **this** have to happen to **me**?*” or “***Everybody’s out to get me.***” The 19th chapter of 1Kings focuses upon one spiritually disabled individual: **the very discouraged prophet Elijah.** We encounter Elijah in the desert, depressed and on the brink of despair. Yet God lifted Elijah out of his depression with words of encouragement and sent Elijah back to life in order to complete the work God still had for him to do and to call Elisha as

his replacement. Today's sermon asks...are you

DISABLED BY DISCOURAGEMENT? GOD WILL RENEW YOU!!

One thing that immediately strikes you as the read the Bible is this: it is not an account of super-heroes whose lives are so saintly and so far above us that we cannot relate to them and their experiences. **Instead we read about people who are really no different than you or me.** There were times when their faith wavered and when they were overwhelmed by circumstances that surrounded them. Even someone like Elijah, probably **the greatest of the Old Testament prophets**, was disabled by discouragement. Elijah faced job-related stress, unexpected difficulties, disappointing results and outright persecution and all combined made him ineffective and "crippled" him spiritually.

Elijah didn't have an easy job. **God had called him to be His prophet during one of the darkest times in the history of Israel.** Wicked King Ahab and his evil wife, Jezebel had together not only permitted idolatry but actually promoted the worship of the false god, Baal, throughout the land. Baal worship had taken hold and flourished among the people of God. It was Elijah's difficult task to call **1.** God's wayward people to repentance, **2.** to denounce the spiritually and morally bankrupt leadership in Israel and **3.** to announce that God was about to send a drought upon the land to chasten His people and turn their hearts back to Him. *Would you have wanted to be Elijah during such a time and do what he had to do?* **And yet, it was a particular sequence of events which occurred near the end of the drought which really crippled Elijah and sent him into the desert DISABLED BY DISCOURAGEMENT.**

Perhaps you recall that at the end of this three-year drought, Elijah had challenged the 450 prophets of Baal to a contest in order to demonstrate who was the true God—the LORD God Almighty or Baal. On Mount Carmel, Baal's prophets built an altar and prepared their sacrifice upon it. In the meantime, Elijah rebuilt the altar to God that had once stood upon the mountain and prepared his sacrifice upon it. The contest was this: *the true God would send down fire from heaven to consume the sacrifice.* The many prophets of Baal prayed all day to no avail...their sacrifice remained untouched. **Near sundown, Elijah prayed just once and God sent down fire from heaven completely consuming the sacrifice!** Three things resulted: **1.** The crowd of Israelites were amazed and fell to the ground in repentance; **2.** Elijah ordered the false prophets of Baal to be gathered and executed; **3.** God sent rain and the long drought came to an end.

What a dramatic demonstration of God's power! No doubt Elijah assumed that a

time of spiritual renewal would sweep across Israel, beginning at the very top with Ahab and Jezebel. Instead, Ahab hardened his heart against what the LORD had done. Jezebel in particular was outraged by the fact that her Baal prophets had been put to death and she influenced Ahab to declare the prophet Elijah should be killed. What did Elijah do? **He fled into the desert, a disabled veteran in the LORD's service.** Notice this: Elijah did not turn to the LORD for help in the midst of his great spiritual discouragement. Instead, he turned and ran and after running for his life he became a hermit and went into hiding. He was finally so discouraged that he had asked God to take his life...he was so low that he felt that life was no longer worth living. In a lonely, desert cave Elijah **wallowed** in self-pity and **alienated himself** from God.

We are often disabled by discouragement too, aren't we? Any number of things or events can cause us to be discouraged. Serious health concerns surface, family problems never seem to get resolved, job-related stress goes off the charts and life in general turns bitter and sour. The events that disable us as individuals can be any number of situations that combine to confound us. **Where do we go for help when we are discouraged?** Are we like Elijah...do we retreat from others and turn away from our loving God instead of turning toward Him in faith? It is easy to focus on the disappointments in our lives, upon our failures and upon the negative aspects of a certain situation. As we retreat into our own spiritual wastelands and withdraw from God and His Word and isolate ourselves from those who would give us their love and care, we too are only making a bad situation even worse.

Thank God that He renews those who are spiritually DISABLED BY DISCOURAGEMENT! God renewed Elijah and God is here for us today and every day to renew us when we are discouraged so that we are not disabled by it. God sought out Elijah in his desert hiding place and **He seeks us out today as well, lovingly longing to renew us with His grace.** We can learn a great deal from how God handled Elijah's great time of discouragement, ministering to him and sending him on his way with renewed vision and purpose.

In today's Old Testament lesson, God came to Elijah as he sat huddled in his desert cave and asked him what he was doing there all alone. Why wasn't he out prophesying? God patiently listened as Elijah poured out his tale of woe: *"I have been very jealous for the LORD, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. And I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away."* Elijah was so low that he felt as if he was the last true believer in Israel.

God's help and plan for renewal for this disabled veteran was dramatic as God revealed to Elijah a tiny portion of His majestic power. A great **wind** came and tore at the rocks outside of Elijah's cave, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind came an **earthquake**, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a **firestorm**, but the LORD was not in the fire. **After the fire there came a soft whisper.** At the sound of God's voice, Elijah came out of the cave and once more God asked Elijah what he was doing there in that desert cave. This time when Elijah repeated his tale of woe, it sounded very hollow in the face of the Lord of hosts who had called him into His service. **The LORD God Almighty who controlled the forces of nature, still had a job for Elijah to do and God wanted to assure Elijah that things were not as bad as they seemed.** God said to Elijah, "*Seven thousand have not yet bowed their knee to Baal.*" **Beginning with this startling revelation, God renewed Elijah and sent him on his way with tasks yet to accomplish for Him.**

Praise God that He renews us when we are spiritually disabled by discouragement! Turning inward upon himself, Elijah had found absolutely nothing which would break through the cloud of discouragement that had descended upon his life. God saw the condition of His beloved prophet and God's gentle voice spoke comfort and encouragement in the midst of Elijah's depression and gloomy despair. **God renewed Elijah and gave him new direction and hope and tasks still to accomplish for Him.** God also stands ready to renew us in the midst of all that has caused our own spiritual disability. God, who controls the winds and waves and forces of nature, is also a God who knows each one of us intimately and **He knows the very things which have combined together to discourage us.** His soft, gentle voice of love whispers to us to come out of our own dark caves of depression and self-pity. **He brings to remembrance once again His great mercy and grace in Christ Jesus.** God does not rate us on the number of successes or failures we accumulate in our lives. It is not by success that He accepts us and it is not by failure that He rejects us. Rather, our faith in His only Son, Jesus Christ, as our Savior—our trust in His forgiving love in Christ Jesus—is what makes us His very own. God has loved us with an everlasting love which brought Him to earth in the Person of His only-begotten Son! Christ died for all of our sins and failures which have left us disabled by discouragement! **His soft, gentle voice beckons to us again today to leave our self-pity behind and walk again in the sunshine of His grace.**

God sent Elijah on his way with tasks yet to accomplish in His great plan of salvation for the world of his day. God also has much for us still to accomplish on His behalf as individual Christians in this world and as a parish here in Amelith. He has

placed us in this time and in this place as His ambassadors in order to bring the love of Christ to all whose lives touch ours. **When we are disabled by discouragement, let us not retreat from life and from God into spiritual wastelands of our own making.** Instead, let us seek Him again today and every day in His Word and let us commune with Him daily in prayer. Let us rejoice again today as He invites us to His Supper. As we do so, we will find a God who loves us, who encourages us, who empowers us and who renews us by His grace each day so that we are not left DISABLED BY DISCOURAGEMENT. May God grant each of us such renewal today and **may we see with cleared vision those tasks with the Lord has for us yet to accomplish for Him.** AMEN

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