



Deep Down Questions

Elijah flees for his life to get as far away as he can from Jezebel's anger. In despair, he questions God's call. God nourishes and sustains Elijah, and speaks to him in the depths of his aloneness, in the sound of sheer silence. There are challenges in being faithful, and God cares for us and supports us in the low points of our lives.

Focus Scripture: 1 Kings 19:1-4, (5-7), 8-15a

The prophet Elijah is in conflict with the prophets of the rain god, Baal. A drought holds Israel in its grip and Baal is not able to bring relief. Elijah and Baal's prophets hold a public test of strength. Elijah shows God's power over creation and over history, calling down fire on the sacrificial altar and then killing the prophets of Baal. King Ahab and his wife, Jezebel, hold Elijah responsible, and Jezebel threatens to kill him. The prophet flees to the southern kingdom of Judah, and beyond into the desert.

Elijah has had enough. In despair Elijah prays to God that he may die. God's angel feeds Elijah twice, encouraging him to sleep and eat to be strengthened for the journey. Elijah travels 40 days and nights to Horeb (Sinai), the mountain where God gave Israel the law and the covenant. Elijah returns to the place where Moses encountered God, and God is with Elijah on the journey.

God asks Elijah, "What are you doing here?" Elijah pours out his frustrations. "I've tried my best. I am the only one of your prophets left. Now they want to kill me." In the midst of Elijah's time of deep down questioning, God is present. As Elijah watches from the cave, there is great rock-splitting wind, an earthquake, and fire. But God is not in any of these. God's power is shown in "a sound of sheer silence" - translated in some Bibles as "a still, small voice." Elijah covers his face in awe at this experience.

God asks the question again, "Elijah, what are you doing here?" Elijah replies in the same words, but this time we can imagine a tone of acceptance of the responsibility God has given him. "Go," God says, "return." God tells Elijah to take up the work again. When Elijah was in despair, God pursued. God strengthened Elijah for the work God called him to do.

God is present in our times of despair, when we are ready to give up. God calls and sustains us in our ministry. We, for our part, need to find opportunities to listen to God in the silence.

Psalms 42 and 43 could be Elijah's prayer. Where is God? Has God forgotten me? These are the "deep down questions" that troubled Elijah and the psalmist. They are questions

that trouble us. But God is a rock. We can hope and trust in God.

As in the Elijah story, the gospel reading shows us that God has power over nature and human life. In **Luke 8:26-39**, Jesus visits a gentile region and meets a person possessed by demons. On the way there, Jesus has calmed the lake storm. Now he calms the troubled man. The man is quieted, and God is found again in the silence. The man would like to go with Jesus, but Jesus sends him to take up his discipleship in everyday life.

Paul is responding to challenging questions in **Galatians 3:23-39**, answering those who say gentile converts must keep all the demands of the Jewish law. Paul argues that, by baptism, we are all children of God through faith and heirs of the promise to Abraham. There is no distinction between Jew and Gentile. All are one in Christ.

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There are times when life overwhelms us and we despair. What questions come to us in such "deep down" moments? God nourishes and sustains us when we allow quiet moments in God's presence to heal and restore us. God sends us back to continue our discipleship in our daily lives. In God's love, we find truth, promise, and hope.

