

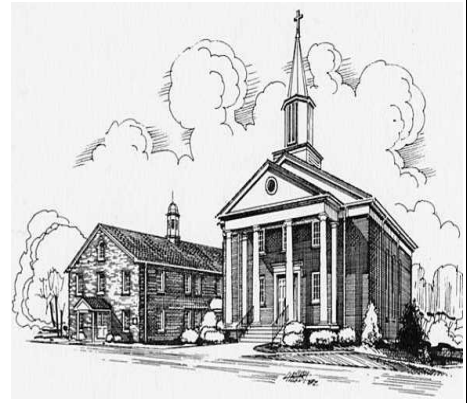
The Lessons Appointed for Use on the

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost:

Proper 7

Year C

RCL



1 Kings 19:1-15a

Psalm 42

Galatians 3:23-29

The Collect

o Lord, make us have perpetual love and reverence
for your holy Name, for you never fail to help and gov-
ern those whom you have set upon the sure foundation
of your lovingkindness; through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one
God, for ever and ever. Amen.

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

Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, “So may the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life like the life of one of them by this time tomorrow.”

Then he was afraid; he got up and fled for his life, and came to Beer-Sheba, which belongs to Judah; he left his servant there.

But he himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a solitary broom tree. He asked that he might die: “It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my ancestors.” Then he lay down under the broom tree and fell asleep. Suddenly an angel touched him and said to him, “Get up and eat.” He looked, and there at his head

was a cake baked on hot stones, and a jar of water. He ate and drank, and lay down again. The angel of the Lord came a second time, touched him, and said, “Get up and eat, otherwise the journey will be too much for you.” He got up, and ate and drank; then he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God. At that place he came to a cave, and spent the night there.

Then the word of the Lord came to him, saying, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” He answered, “I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away.”

He said, “Go out and stand on the mountain before the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by.” Now there

was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then there came a voice to him that said, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” He answered, “I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away.” Then the LORD said to him, “Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus.”

Psalm 42

1 As the deer longs for the water-brooks, *
so longs my soul for you, O God.

2 My soul is athirst for God, athirst for the living God;
*

when shall I come to appear before the presence of
God?

3 My tears have been my food day and night, *
while all day long they say to me,
“Where now is your God?”

4 I pour out my soul when I think on these things: *
how I went with the multitude and led them into the
house of God,

5 With the voice of praise and thanksgiving, *
among those who keep holy-day.

6 Why are you so full of heaviness, O my soul? *
and why are you so disquieted within me?

7 Put your trust in God; *
for I will yet give thanks to him,
who is the help of my countenance, and my God.

8 My soul is heavy within me; *
therefore I will remember you from the land of Jordan,
and from the peak of Mizar among the heights of Her-

mon.

9 One deep calls to another in the noise of your
cataracts; *

all your rapids and floods have gone over me.

10 The Lord grants his loving-kindness in the daytime;
*

in the night season his song is with me,
a prayer to the God of my life.

11 I will say to the God of my strength,

“Why have you forgotten me? *

and why do I go so heavily while the enemy oppresses
me?”

12 While my bones are being broken, *

my enemies mock me to my face;

13 All day long they mock me *

and say to me, “Where now is your God?”

14 Why are you so full of heaviness, O my soul? *

and why are you so disquieted within me?

15 Put your trust in God; *

for I will yet give thanks to him,

who is the help of my countenance, and my God.

Galatians 3:23-29

NOW before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.

SERMON

A new husband was watching admiringly as his bride prepared their first meal together. She began by cutting off the end of the ham!

“Why did you do that?” he asked.

“I don’t know”, she replied. “My mother always did that.”

Sunday rolled around and the husband asked his new mother-in-law why she always cut off the end of the ham. He was intrigued.

“I don’t really know”, she said. “My mother always did that.”

Now it was a mystery, and he determined to get to the bottom of it. Off he went to find Gram-ma. “Why did you cut off the end of the ham before you cooked it?”

“Pan was too short”, she replied.

We are people of tradition, but we're often not clear on why we do what we do. Nevertheless, we're pretty convinced that if you want to cook a ham, you have to cut off the end first, even if we can't give a coherent account of why. There's a deep lesson here and it is this: religion, traditions and faith are not the same things. Moving in faith is the willingness to be guided by God's direction. Religion is the story of faith – the accounts of people who moved in faith. Tradition is the way we've always done things. We're enormously protective of our religion and our traditions. In fact, we often settle for religion and traditions, and become suspicious of people moving in faith. How often have you heard a described as a “church-going Christian”? Religion and traditions ARE important, but they are not the most important. Faith is the most important thing – the willingness to subject ourselves to the will of God – and that faith

does not come from human effort. It comes from God. The presence of the God-given gift of faith is the element which saves religion and traditions from themselves. Those who would faithlessly follow their religion will always go astray.

I heard a story on BBC this week of a 17 year old girl in Pakistan. She had eloped and married a man without her family's permission, contrary to their religion and traditions. They lured her back with promises of a reconciliation, but instead tortured her and set her on fire. If your religion tells you that such a terrible thing is acceptable, you have gravely misunderstood your religion. Acting in faith means allowing yourself to be led by God.

The accounts in the Bible are accounts of people touched by God, who have responded to the challenges of their time. If we would be faithful Christians, we

must allow ourselves to be lead by our God-given faith, not by the traditions that make up our religion. Elijah's troubles with Jezebel give us an opportunity to understand what being led by God means.

As you will remember, our accounts of Elijah's struggle with Jezebel occurred during a time when Israel and Judah were two different countries. Ahab, king of Israel, had married Jezebel, the daughter of the king of Tyre to secure his border – a political marriage. Jezebel was trying to lead Israel away from God to the worship of Baal. It was a bloody struggle. Jezebel killed the prophets of God. In return, Elijah killed the prophets of Baal. That was the understanding of the time – an eye for an eye – but now it's personal.

Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Eli-

jah, saying, “So may the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life like the life of one of them by this time tomorrow.” Then he was afraid; he got up and fled for his life, and came to Beer-Sheba, which belongs to Judah; he left his servant there.

Jezebel’s message frightened Elijah and he booked it for the hills.

But he himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a solitary broom tree. He asked that he might die: “It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my ancestors.”

How very unhelpful.

Then he lay down under the broom tree and fell asleep. Suddenly an angel touched him and said to him, “Get up and eat.” He looked, and there at his head was a cake baked on hot stones, and a jar of water. He ate and drank, and lay down again. The angel of the Lord came a second time, touched him, and said,

“Get up and eat, otherwise the journey will be too much for you.” He got up, and ate and drank; then he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God. At that place he came to a cave, and spent the night there.

The story of Elijah’s faith, or, in this case, the lack thereof, informs our religion, our story of faith. His failures illuminate our failures, and his eventual success lights the path for us. Elijah ran from the course God had laid out for him, just as we so often do, and was being rebellious. God made no bones about confronting him on his cowardice.

Then the word of the Lord came to him, saying, “What are you doing here, Elijah?”

Elijah clearly understood that he’s in the soup, and offered an excuse.

He answered, “I have been very zealous for the

Lord, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away.”

“You can't expect me to go where you lead, God! They'll kill me!” Wrong, Elijah. God expects just that, as the story of Jesus illustrates for us. The story of faith is always about moving through fear from our current, flawed, understanding into a better understanding so that we may move beyond the older ways into newer, deeper lives of faith. Paul addressed this in his letter to the church in Galatia.

Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinar-

ian, for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.

We see this great theme echoing through history. The traditions of the time have torn the people away from the course God has set for them, so God raises up a prophet who moves in faith to address the wound. The people of the time, heeding, sometimes not so willingly, the words and actions of the prophet, come to see their error and repent. The trouble begins anew, though, when they forget the struggle and story of the prophet and simply wrap tradition around their repentance, making an idol of their traditions all over again! Like

the young wife, we forget why we do what we do, and begin blindly to honor our traditions again. As Paul wrote, it is not enough just to follow the law; God requires that we move in faith, and we do not do so alone. Perhaps the foundation of Reformed theology is that in every moment of our lives we are in the presence of the living God: “In life and in death we belong to God”. We are never beyond God’s purview and never beyond God’s grace.¹

AMEN

¹ From A Brief Statement of Faith (10:1, line 1)

BENEDICTION

The Reformed tradition is built upon several principles, one of the most important being “sola scriptura” (Lat. “Scripture alone”). The church’s authority is only the Holy Scriptures and not ecclesiastical traditions or human opinions. We would do well to understand better those things to which we give fealty, lest they lead us astray.

Optional parts of the readings are set off in square brackets.

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