

Text: 1 Kings 19:9-18. 12th Sunday after Pentecost. **August 31, 2014**

In the name of Jesus, *who is so much better than we expected*, dear friends in Christ...

"Your kids are so well-behaved!" "Tell me – what's your secret?" "How do you ever do it?!" If you've been blessed with children, you might feel extra special when you hear compliments like these. And how do you respond? My guess is: you're polite and you try to put the best construction on everything. *"Oh, you're too kind, really." "Lots of prayer required!" "I guess it's just a good day!"* But PARENTS, you know the truth! You've seen firsthand that Jekyll & Hyde routine that each of your children has mastered. No, things are *not* as they seem! Because, if one thing is certain, good behavior does not last. If anything, it's a means to an end, right? Just give it a little time – and brace yourselves – that dramatic, climactic sideshow is about to begin... get ready! And whether it happens in public or behind closed doors, here it comes: the **MAJOR MELTDOWN**. A little boy drops his ice cream cone; you'd think the world has gone up in flames. Tears flow. A crescendo of screams. Go to extremes. You can just imagine the horror. In that little boy's mind's eye, everybody else in all of America is enjoying their ice cream – except for him. I know – life... is rough!

YOU HAVE SEEN THAT CHILD. YOU'VE HEARD THAT CHILD. YOU WERE THAT CHILD!

For all the attention that one child draws by melting down, by throwing a huge temper tantrum... maybe more importantly – what happens next? What is a parent to do? Tell me, how would *you* handle the meltdown? What can *your* child expect? Well, perhaps a spanking is in order. If that's not your style, you might crouch down at the child's level, and offer a sufficiently stern warning. Or maybe it's a case where it's best to simply ignore. Give it some time. Let things play out. Hopefully it's just a phase, right? Because sooner or later, SOMEDAY—we figure—every child makes this magical transformation from that *terrible two-year-old* into a full-grown, mature *adult* who has it all put together! Hallelujah, right? Meltdowns are a thing of the past. Thank goodness, the world no longer revolves around only me! Adult life is such smooth sailing, I tell you!

Leave it to the prophet Elijah to interrupt our wishful thinking. Leave it to one of God's very best to remind us that—**you don't have to be a KID to have a meltdown!** (I'm not giving you permission, just sharing a reality.) Sure, we may have moved beyond broken toys, early bedtimes, and spilled milk, but people just get bigger, and so do the problems. There's no use denying—we shake regularly shake our fists at the sky. First it's, *"Hurry up and help me, God!"* Then it's, *"Why did you let that happen?"* It's really quite simple: **our plan doesn't line up with God's, and we don't like that.** God's standard operating procedure is, well, *different* from ours. It's that FUNDAMENTAL DISCONNECT between God and people. To make matters worse, we tend to have these strange and selfish expectations. Meanwhile, God does not. But before Elijah—or ANY OF US—become frustrated enough to short-circuit, blow a fuse, wrench up our face, or MELT DOWN altogether ... it's the LORD himself who says to you and me:

Expect the Unexpected!

Expect: A Rude Awakening

Expect: A Gentle Whisper

How exactly did Elijah end up in that cave? We need a quick recap. (It's really quite remarkable when you trace Elijah's journey south—almost 200 miles *on foot!* Elijah was fresh off his dramatic showdown with the false prophets of Baal. And he had destroyed them. Absolutely humiliated them. Made their idols look silly. The LORD demonstrated his unique power in full, there on Mount Carmel. The LORD even rained down fire from heaven as an "exclamation point." Then he answered Elijah's prayer by sending actual rain throughout Israel, thus ending a three-and-half-year drought! Throughout Elijah's life, up until these miracles, and especially now, Elijah had every reason in the world to confidently praise the LORD. He had every reason to forget all his worries and fears. He had every reason to place his trust squarely in Him. After all, **Elijah always knew what to expect** from the LORD his God.

BUT—next thing you know, wicked King Ahab relays the bad results of the Mount Carmel showdown to his even more wicked wife Jezebel. Naturally, Jezebel—bloodthirsty princess that she is—wants Elijah dead. Things start to unravel. Apparently, Elijah forgets all of what God just did. He gets scared. He makes a run for it. He heads into desert wilderness. Forty days and forty nights and two more miracles later, Elijah arrives at the place where God first spoke with Moses – Mount Horeb.

Ok, just to be clear, NONE of this was by God's design.
Elijah was straight-up *running away!!!* **This is not what he expected...**

... but if you're in Elijah's shoes, maybe his incredible detour makes a little sense. You see, Elijah was God's faithful prophet. He was a bold preacher of his God's Word. But suddenly Elijah was *disappointed*, disappointed that God's chosen people were rejecting his covenant. Suddenly Elijah was *discouraged*, discouraged that God's established authorities were literally killing off his colleagues. Suddenly Elijah was *depressed*, depressed because he was next on their hit list! All of a sudden Elijah found himself so far *down-in-the-dumps* that he himself wanted to die – maybe you would too after meandering around the desert for more than a month!

This is not what he expected.

Of course, Elijah wasn't crying over a fallen ice cream cone. In fact he *was doing much worse*. Elijah was griping, grumbling, and going to extremes. He was grasping in vain for God's next move. Elijah was challenging the LORD himself, questioning God's plan, and was gradually shifting the focus from God onto himself. So when God found his prophet feeling all forsaken and forlorn, he asked him, "**Elijah, what are you doing here?**" ... but Elijah was way too sad, stubborn and self-righteous to see his own sin.

Elijah, what happened? Momentum had totally swung. A few months ago thousands in Israel were shouting in unison: "*The LORD—he is God! The LORD—he is God!*" There they were on Mount Carmel. They were witnesses of **God vs. Baal**. But Elijah had long since come down from that spiritual high. He was alone now. He was feeling blue. *Okay. It happens.* But Elijah's mistake was to dwell on this moment of loneliness. And he let it grow. A whole lot of despair. Now *panic. Paranoia.* He expected God to ACT NOW! Elijah actually thought he was the only one left! While Elijah's claim was half-truth, it was also *half-ridiculous*. The sincere prophet had become cynical. The previously confident Elijah was now a broken record. Complaining directly into the face of God: "***I've been very zealous for you LORD.***"

Just as a little boy spirals into a temper tantrum because he didn't get a trophy, isn't this what Elijah was doing? Elijah was having a MELTDOWN, a full-fledged ADULT MELTDOWN. He was mentally, physically, spiritually drained.

It's not what he expected. Elijah expected something different. Swift judgment. More fire from heaven. A personal reward. Just a little recognition. More or less, Elijah's message was clear: "*I'm unhappy, Lord. Do something about it. I'll just be over here ... in this cave.*"

Dear friends, you don't have to be a kid, and you don't have to be God's prophet under pressure. When will it happen this year? Sometime this week? Later on today? When will it happen? I'm sorry, but it's inevitable. **You and I will melt down.**

We'll be all alone. In our own cave. All out of sorts.
We'll say: "*How did I end up here? This is not what I expected.*"

1. "This is not what I expected for my career path. I'm not content here." MELTDOWN.
2. "This is not what I expected high school to be. People are nasty! It's all one big popularity contest. I hate it." MELTDOWN.
3. "This is marriage? I'm sorry, it's not what I expected. I'm drained. I'm done." MELTDOWN.

I'm not looking to pile it on, but if you think a little further, don't so many of our flaws and insecurities seem to really amp up and get exposed once we're around church? *"How is your faith life? Don't tell me-- it's not what you expected?!"*

1. Maybe you're an *Elijah*. Been doing this church thing all your life ... you know ALL ABOUT what it means to be an active, willing, servant-minded church member. You're a mature Christian in need of some meatier doctrine. BUT... your hard work and sacrifice all these years is *rarely* mentioned. You've *"been very zealous for the LORD."* You're righteously fed up. MELTDOWN.

2. Or, let's say you're brand new to the faith. You thought Christianity would make your life EASIER!!! A neat, tidy, cookie-cutter Christian life. Uhhh, not the case! Life is definitely harder, and you feel like you're always being judged. Is the Christian life just one big competition? If it is, you will most definitely **MELT DOWN**.

Recall how God came to Elijah and calmly asked him TWICE:

"What are you doing here?"

Well... Resurrection family... **"What are you doing here?"**

You've been buffeted by a wind, shaken up by an earthquake, scorched by a fire.

Are you thoroughly awake?

The truth is rude and it hurts.

THIS IS NOT ABOUT YOU.

It's all about Jesus. The Word. The gentle whisper.

This is not about you. It's about his perfect zeal for the Father. It's not about you. It's about his holy obedience to the Father's greater plan. It's not about you. It's about his complete and willing fulfillment of God's demands. No one else can make this claim. None of the world's billions and trillions. None of the saints or angels who are in heaven. Only the **savior** who took your place. The **savior** Elijah knew would come. The **savior** who did come in unexpected fashion. The one whom the Father sent to seek and to save the lost. It's not about you, but about Jesus, the **savior** who has reconciled the world to himself. It's not about you, but about Jesus, who took all your *meltdowns* and left them at the cross. It's about Jesus, who forgives every last one, who lives to wipe away all your *meltdown tears*. It's all about Jesus, who died, who rose; who'll come again.

Until that time, dear friends in Christ, why expect anything or anyone more POWERFUL than this? Oh, I suppose he could quick change everything if he wanted. He could use something more EXTRAVAGANT or GRANDIOSE. He could favor the BIGGEST, the BEST, the STRONGEST, the WEALTHIEST. But I wouldn't expect it. He'll keep things simple. He'll stick with the WEAK, the UNIMPRESSIVE, the FOOLISH, the UNEXPECTED. He'll lift up to honor and glory whatever is SMALLEST and WORST in the eyes of men. Because ... this is not about you, or me. This is about HIM, Jesus, who quiets stormy waters and calms silly worry with a still, small voice.

The LORD encouraged Elijah with the same—**that gentle whisper of his Word**. Not with a wind, not with an earthquake, not even by fire. Even as Elijah stood dumbfounded, frozen, and uncomprehending atop Mount Horeb, God chose to comfort his depressed and doubting servant. The LORD handled his prophet's meltdown with all grace, mercy, and forgiveness—Elijah could not have expected that!

God still comes to each of his children with the gentle whisper of his Gospel. It gets the job done, and is all we should expect from God. Expect that whisper to provide contentment at your job. Expect that whisper to calm your high schooler's anxious heart. Expect that Gospel whisper to enrich and strengthen a marriage you once considered hopeless. Continue to **expect the unexpected** from God's gentle whisper. It packs enough power to positively melt the hardest of hearts, to change lives forever, to restore even the worst of meltdowns. *"So tell me, what's your secret? How do you do it?"* **JESUS**. Amen.