

“Wanted”
1 Kings 19:9-19
Rev. David Hutchinson
Sunday, May 12, 2019

I DON'T know - - what it feels like - - to be a FUGITIVE.

I've seen the movie “the Fugitive” - - but that's not the same thing.

As far as the LAW is concerned - - I have never been a fugitive.

I can pass background checks.

In fact - - as a minister - - I find myself COOPERATING with the LAW.

I've been friends with police officers.

Which is NOT to say I'm perfect - - or have never done anything wrong.

It's SIMPLY to say THIS:

I don't have any first-hand experience with being a WANTED MAN.

I don't know first-hand what it's like to be - - “living on the lam”

I've seen POSTERS in the Post Office on the wall and wondered about the people there. / How did they get there - - what led to that point in their life? / I've watched *Orange is the New Black* and *Dead Men Walking* and wondered about how people end up in prison. / I thought about how different my life is than that.

And I'm just guessing here - - but I bet MOST of you are in a SIMILAR situation.

I've had GLIMPSES of the other side - - like being pulled over for speeding.

Or getting an overdue notice in the mail for a bill I forgot to pay.

But it's rare.

When I was in High School my friend's dad owned a hardware store.

It was late - - one night - - and some of us were there.

There was a pool table in the back room. / And cases of warm soda pop by the pop machine that you could drink for free. / His dad knew we went there after closing time. / But the local POLICE department did NOT!

They do now.

It didn't take long to explain that we were not burglars.

We were with the "proprietor's son".

Which is what my friend called himself when he talked to the police officer.

But for a few minutes I felt like we were "wanted men".

That was a long time ago.

And so mostly - - I don't know much about how it feels to be a wanted man.

The prophet Elijah - - in the Old Testament however - - DOES know!

In this morning's scripture reading - - he is ON THE RUN.

On the LAM - - they call it.

Elijah is a wanted man - - a fugitive.

He's wanted by an EVIL QUEEN - - who didn't like some of the negative things he said about her administration. / It's a risk of having the job if a prophet - - it turns out. / So he's more of a political prisoner than a burglar. But he's WANTED!

Elijah is on the run.

He's on the run - - because - - he stood up for what he thought was RIGHT!

He's on the run - - because he challenged corruption.

He's on the run - - because he tried to do what GOD told him to.

All alone he stood up for Yahweh - - against the prophets of Baal.

He was strong and SASSY on Mt. Carmel.

But now he's burned out.

He feels isolated and alone.

How long can he keep trying - - and trying - - all alone... ?

AND - - NOW - - the Queen is out to KILL him!

And FRANKLY all he really WANTS - - is to be LEFT alone.

He even tells God he wants to DIE.

What is it like?

To try and to try - - and to seem to go NOWHERE?

To feel like you're fighting an uphill battle?

To have nothing go your way?

Bills get higher - - taxes get higher - - salary gets smaller...

Problems at work - - and at home - - with your kids - - and even your pets!

Everyone turning against you!?!

Can you relate to this burnout - - prophet - - Isaiah?

Anyone...?

You walk through the half dead shopping mall - - and your friends want everything they can get their hands on. / And you're tempted to some form of corruption or other... Depressed... A victim of bad luck...

And so what happens?

We crawl into a CAVE.

Which - - - is EXACTLY what Elijah did.

Elijah crawled off - - to hibernate - - in a cave - - and be left alone.

But - - then what happens?

God comes by!

Darn it!

As Elijah sits curled up in a ball in his cave - - God won't leave him alone.

First there is a big earthquake.

Then a violent wind - - like the wind of his past problems blowing in...

Then a great FIRE...

And THEN - - it all QUIETS down.

Silence.

Stillness.

And in the quiet - - Elijah hears - - a tiny little voice.

And it is ONLY THEN - - that he gets up.

Elijah gets up and goes to the door of his cave.

And he comes out - - ready - - to keep living.

All the windy - - firey - - power of God can't do it for him.

He has to decide to get up and keep walking.

And he's finally ready - - when he hears that tiny voice - - in the stillness.

What he realizes is VERY IMPORTANT:

There is ONE power that WANTED him MORE than ALL the evil in the world.

Elijah is WANTED - - by GOD!

Yes - - Elijah is a wanted man.

But he's not ONLY wanted - - by the LAW - - and the evil QUEEN...

He's wanted by GOD!

God STILL has something for him to do.

Elijah is NOT ONLY a fugitive - - he is ALSO a PROPHET.

He is ALSO - - a teacher.

He is also - - a FIGHTER.

The way God brings Elijah OUT of his depression is interesting.

God doesn't say - - relax and recover.

Take it easy - - it's rough running from an evil queen.

God says - - GET UP - - I've got something MORE for you to DO!

Specifically, God says, "Elijah - - what are you DOING here? / GO and anoint a NEW king - - and find a companion - - and teach him everything you know".

Find Elisha - - and PASS on your knowledge.

Several things strike me here:

FIRST - - his life is renewed by having a NEW task.

It might seem harsh or uncompassionate at first - - but God knows that it's the right cure for a sense of meaningless and depression.

I remember a woman named Hazel who was once nominated as the new treasurer of the Sr. Citizens group. / She was homebound and was withdrawing from things. / But the group decided that she could still do this job - - and so they did not take "no" for an answer.

You are STILL wanted - - they said!

The SECOND thing that strikes me about Elijah is that his PURPOSE is to raise up someone ELSE to take HIS place eventually. / His purpose is to pass on what he knows.

As we ordain and install new leaders - - or baptize new members - - we are doing something similar. / We are passing on what we know.

So remember - - when it feels like some kind of evil is after you...

Like your religion is silly - - and people want you to be dishonest...

Remember - - God wants you MORE!

Or when you feel like you are too OLD to be wanted by the world...

Remember - - God wants you MORE!

Don't crawl off and curl up in a cave.

Instead - - listen - - for that still small voice.

There is an old Norwegian story retold by Robert Bly that I'll ALSO alter - - and retell - - and close with today. It adds insight about how we might listen for that voice in our lives:

A girl is on a journey - - and she has been walking all day.

As night falls - - the girl comes to a house.

In the yard a woman is chopping wood.

The woman seems to be about 30 years old. / The girl asks, "Would it be possible for me to stay overnight in your house?" / The woman answers, "It's alright with me - - but I'm not the MATRIARCH of this house - - you'll have to ask my mother..."

The woman looks toward the doorway and the girl sees a woman of about 70 years old.

The girl asks, "Pardon me ma'am, but I've been walking all day, would it be possible to stay overnight in your house?"

“It’s ok with me, but I’m not the matriarch of the house, you’ll have to ask my mother - - who is sitting at the table in there.”

So the girl goes in and asks that woman:

The woman at the table looks like she’s about 100 years old.

“Pardon me, but I’m a traveler, could I stay a night in your house?”

“It’s all right with me, but you’ll have to ask my mother...”

And there is another OLDER woman in a bed.

And this OLDEST woman - - says in a still small voice - - a WHISPER: “Yes”

There is a tiny grandfather next to this tiny old woman and together they HAND OVER the keys of the house - - to this young girl.

In order for the house to be handed over - - the girl had to be shown the way by the oldest couple in the house. / And she was willing to ask.

And to wait and to listen...

So how can we do similar?

How can we hand over the keys to the future...?

To people - - willing to care?

People who are wanted - - and who want us?

How can we rediscover our direction in life?

On this day when we celebrate mothers in our lives - - these seem like important questions for us all to ask.

May we all live - - as if we are wanted - - by one another - - and by God.

Amen.