

## God Shows Up

### 1 King 19

It's only March, and the weather this weekend has reminded us that we're still a long way from summer,

but I've had summer much on my mind these past couple weeks –

or at least, I've had the first week of July much on my mind.

That's when our Appalachia Service Project trip takes place, of course,

and I've been *all ASP all the time*, of late,

between organizing for our big fundraiser in a couple weeks,

and getting the kids together for orientation meetings with me.

With the newbie kids, the nervous freshmen,

I'm focused on words of reassurance –

yes, you WILL be able to fix a roof, I promise.

But with the veterans, as much as anything,

we're swapping stories.

Because as surely as you come home from Appalachia with an arm sore from swinging a hammer,

just as surely, you come home with stories.

And after 34 years of leading the trip, I've got lots of stories myself.

One of the stories that's stuck with me is from very early in my ASP experience,

my second year leading the trip.

It's a simple story,

but it ended up shaping everything I understood about mission and service.

It was late morning on the Tuesday of ASP week.

And it was a beautiful day.

The sun was shining but it wasn't too hot -- a little breeze was blowing - it was, in fact, a perfect ASP work day for me and my very enthusiastic work crew.

That is, it would have been the perfect work day.

Except that I had made a rather crucial error that morning.

I had forgotten a bucket of screws , and they were kind of essential screws.

We actually couldn't do the next step of our project without them.

And so we were stuck.

My whole crew couldn't do anything until someone from the ASP staff

showed up in their pick-up truck with the screws I'd left behind.

And I was really mad at myself.

And chagrined, and embarrassed.

Kids wait all year to get to go to Appalachia and make a difference, and there they were, eager to work and they couldn't.

So I told them to go sit in the shade and relax,

and I went and sat by myself so that I could feel miserable all alone.

And that's where the nun found me.

To be honest, I didn't actually know she was a nun.

I was sitting on the hillside moping,

and I noticed this woman in jeans making her way slowly up through the holler to us.

When she finally got to where I was sitting, she just sat down next to me, and said "Beautiful view, isn't it?"

She was right, it was spectacular. I hadn't really been noticing.

And then she said, "How's the work going?"

I almost started crying.

And I said, "we can't work because we don't have the screws AND we don't have the screws because I forgot them."

And there was a pause, and she nodded a little, and then she said,

"So what does God want you to do instead?"

*(pause)* "What?" I said.

"I'm with the Sisters of Mercy," she said, "I'm the one who told this family that they should call ASP for help."

Which made me feel so much worse.

And then she asked me again:.

"What do you think God wants you to do right now?"

I didn't know what the right answer was to give this nun, but I was pretty sure "God wants me to whine and cry some more" was the *wrong* answer.

"Here's what I think," she said. "I think you should go knock on the front door of the house. Because while you're waiting for your screws to show up, there's a family inside that you should be getting to know ."

So that's what we did. Me and my crew.

We knocked on the door, and were welcomed in by folks who were so glad to make us feel at home.

And we spent the next two hours until those screws showed up sharing stories, and laughing, and listening.

Much later, at the end of the week, after we'd done a lot of good work, **that** was the day that my whole crew looked back on with greatest joy.

I learned then that true mission work is born in the connections that bring people together in love and service.

And none of that would have happened had not a nun in blue jeans wandered up the hill and sat herself down.

At ASP, we call those God moments.

Moments when God just shows up.

God shows up.

The story that Tony read for you is about God showing up for someone who really, really needed God right then.

Someone who, like me, was moping around and feeling sorry for himself for a lot better reason than a missing bucket of screws.

The story is about the prophet Elijah, alone in the wilderness.

Elijah was someone for whom everything had been going right, and now it wasn't.

Here's the back story:

Elijah had been a great and mighty prophet of God, renowned, beloved, esteemed.

He was a favorite of the King, who was a faithful follower of God.

Elijah wasn't, however, so much a favorite of the *Queen*, a not very nice woman named Jezebel.

And, long story short, Jezebel turns the King against Elijah, and Elijah, the popular and revered prophet Elijah, ends up having to run for his life from one very angry King and Queen.

And he ends up running into the wilderness, to God knows where.

And out there in the wilderness, Elijah runs out of everything.

He runs out of food, yes, but he also runs out of hope.

He'd done everything right, he thought,

but now nothing's going right.

And he's done. He's just -- done.

And the story says that he collapses under a tree,

and he says to God "it's enough."

And, exhausted, he falls asleep.

And what happens next?

Well, God shows up.

God shows up.

There's a little tap on Elijah's shoulder, and he opens his eyes and looks,

and there's an angel, the story says,

an angel who says "Get up and eat, Elijah."

And there, right beside him, is bread and water.

And eats, and he sleeps some more, and then it happens again:

there's bread beside him, and Elijah hears God's voice saying

"Get up and eat, Elijah, or this journey will be too much for you."

When he is at his lowest, when Elijah doesn't want to go on anymore,

when it's all too much -- that's when God shows up.

That's when God shows up in the wilderness,

and says: here's bread for the journey.

Take, and eat.

God comes to Elijah in the toughest moment of his life

and says “here you go. Here's what you need to get yourself going again.”

Kind of like a nun unexpectedly walking up the hill.

God shows up.

You might remember, though, that there was more to the story Tony shared.

The scripture says that Elijah takes himself to the top of the highest mountain – still searching, still uncertain.

Elijah climbs up the top of the mountain and waits for God, again.

And the story says that God shows up, again.

Scripture puts it like this:

*There was a great wind ... 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 still, small voice.*



A whisper, a gentle voice with just the words that Elijah needed.

A comforting voice, calling him forward, encouraging him on.

God shows up in the wilderness with bread for the journey.

And God shows up on the mountaintop not in fireworks and loud noise but in a gentle voice, a still small voice.

For Elijah, God shows up with strength when it's needed and the whisper of encouragement Elijah longed for.

And God shows up for us.

I've mentioned before from this pulpit my fondness for a particular podcast called The Moth.

The Moth is purely storytelling, stories told by people like you and me, who simply have a tale to tell.

And I love hearing people's stories,

because in truth I think that's how God speaks to us most often.

This story is one I heard about a year ago.

It was told by a doctor, about the time she was a resident,  
and being worked to the bone, on call day after day.

And she was starting to question whether this was the life for her,  
whether this was really her calling.

There was a particularly grueling six months when she was working in the  
ICU of an incredibly busy city hospital,  
and in the midst of those six months the ambulance showed up one night  
with a girl who'd been in a car accident,  
the kind of accident you don't usually survive.

The girl's name was Savannah.

They rushed Savannah right into surgery, hours long,  
and then to ICU in a medically-induced coma.

For the next two months, Dr. Dixon was Savannah's doctor.

And every day when she came into the room, she would talk to Savannah,  
even though Savannah was comatose –

Dr. Dixon would sit by her bed and explain what was going to happen each  
day;

she'd whisper encouragement to Savannah,

tell her to stay strong, and remember how many people loved her.

Every day.

Dr. Dixon was rotated out of the ICU while Savannah was still in the coma, with her outcome still uncertain.

She was rotated to another hospital, where she continued to work those brutally long hours, continued to wonder whether this was the life for her.

A year later, as it happened, she was back in that same ICU.

And one day she was talking with a nurse, and from down the hallway, a girl turned, saw her, and came running to her, excited.

She said “hey, doctor! It’s me, Savannah!”

And she was well. Healthy, healed.

Dr. Dixon was overwhelmed with the joy of it, and then she realized something.

She said to Savannah, “wait a minute, how did you know who I am?”

You’ve never *met* me.

You were unconscious the whole time I took care of you.”

And Savannah said “Oh, I recognized your voice.

*You were the one who always talked to me.”*

And Dr. Dixon – who was crying as she told this story –  
she said “That was the moment.

That was the moment that I realized that it was all worth it,  
that all that sacrifice was worth it.

That I was where I was supposed to be.”

God showed up.

God showed up for a girl named Savannah, in the still small voice of a doctor  
whispering words of strength and love to her.

God showed up for a doctor who was questioning her calling, in the voice of  
a girl who ran to her with excitement and spoke to her with joy.

God showed up in the voices of two people who were the presence of the  
Holy to each other.

God showed up.

Long ago,

God showed up in the life of a prophet who was scared and lonely and  
unsure of the way,

God showed up in Elijah's wilderness to coax him to his feet  
and get him on his way.

And God showed up as a still small voice to whisper the words that needed  
to be heard.

And God keeps doing it.

God shows up in our wildernesses.

When we are uncertain, alone, unsure,

God shows up in the ones who are the presence of the holy,  
who bring unexpected kindness, comfort just when needed.

God shows up in the strength that lifts us to our feet,

God shows up in the hope that feeds our souls.

God shows up.

In the still small voice of the one who says just the right word,  
in the still small voice *within* us reminding us of who we are.

Let this be the lesson of our Lenten journey,  
as our path moves toward an empty tomb

and towards death defeated by an on-time God.

Let this be our lesson: Ours is a God who always shows up.

Amen.