

Reflection and sermon
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What is in a name?

I come from the Igbo tribe in Nigeria and we take names very seriously. We believe that a person's name, is unique and brings about the sense of personal identity. Therefore, it is important to us as individuals and as a society.

Names are most times given according to the events surrounding a birth or after an important person to the family. But it must have a meaning to bless the individual, indicating something about them, names are active for us. We believe our names are associated with our personality, character, the way we act and our psychological adjustment, most importantly, how we perform later in life.

God identified Himself to Moses at a time Moses was not sure of how to identify God: as "I AM THAT I AM". God changed Abrams identity to Abraham, Sarai to Sarah as he made the covenant of increase and blessings with Abraham.

The Lord gave Jacob a new name, Israel, as he reaffirmed his covenant with his Grandfather Abraham in his own life. After Saul's Damascus experience and conversion, his name was changed to Paul. In our reading today we listen to Elijah's relationship with God.

Elijah means *my God is Yahweh*, did Elijah remember the meaning and strength entrenched in his name as he struggled in our bible reading today; the name Jesus also means *Yahweh saves, delivers, or rescues* what a wonderful name.

We are called The Body of Christ, what does it mean and what does it mean to us? As we worship God by singing Hymn 485 *Dear Lord and Father of Mankind* led by Jose and Eloise let us ponder on the name The Body of Christ and how it affects how we perform and act in life.

Sermon: - 1 Kings 19:9-18 Be Encouraged.

Our Bible verse is an aftermath of Elijah's encounter with the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel where he challenged the people to follow whoever was the true God. Although the prophets of Baal raved all afternoon Baal did not answer nor came down to consume the sacrifice, but God sent fire from heaven and consumed his sacrifice helping Elijah to accomplish what he sent him to do. Elijah then commanded that all the prophets of Baal to be put to death incurring the wrath of Jezebel.

Now therefore, Elijah was a man in a troubled depressing situation, in a dark place. Jezebel has sworn to kill Elijah, for killing the prophets of Baal and knowing Jezebel, she was not making an empty threat.

The word of God came at a time Elijah needed reassurance that God was with him. It was refreshing to know that God was looking out for him, God never lets his own down. No matter how deep and dark our situation is, God finds us with a solution. At every point in Elijah's encounter with God, and the word of the Lord comes to him.

This is a very distressing time; we have all experienced fear and loneliness one way or the other. The fear of losing a loved one to Covid-19 or getting it ourselves, or of being alone in our coffee time, study, movie, lunch time. Before Covid-19, we were all able to go out for coffee with a friend, share a book with our reading group, visit grandchildren, parents, grandparents etc. We have all lost our drive and motivation at some point in time in this pandemic.

Our Bible verse started with telling us where Elijah was, and the Lord appeared to him there. It says: -

There Elijah went into a cave and spent the night.

And the word of the LORD came to him: *"What are you doing here, Elijah?"*

Elijah's response to God shows that he needed someone to talk to, that will listen to him. God was saying come out of the cave, it is time to take a step into my presence, but the fear of Jezebel's threat to kill Elijah has made him lose his focus on who God is. When we focus on ourselves, we lose sight of God who saves. Loneliness causes fear, depression, and confusion. In fear, Elijah forgot God's identity; I AM THE I AM. Elijah also forgot his own identity "God is Yahweh".

Elijah replied, *"I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your*

prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.”

God seeing that the fear of Jezebel has come between them, he has lost his way, he needed to go back into the presence of God. God asked him to come out of the cave. Every believer at sometime in our lives need a time of spiritual renewal, the joy of coming back to the presence of God is awesome. God’s grace brings us back to him. Most times we start telling our tales of woe, or give reasons why we fall into sin, or complain how life is so unfair when we have been “good Christians” like Elijah.

Then the LORD said, *“Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by.”*

Worthy of note, Elijah after the angel of the Lord has fed him earlier in verse 7, he went 40 days and 40 nights until he came to Mount Horeb (The Mountain of the Lord, the same mountain that Moses met with the Lord). Elijah instead of going up to the mountain, went into the cave.

But the Lord says even in the cave I see you Elijah, I hear you Elijah, I feel you.

Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. ¹² After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. ¹³ When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.

We only whisper into the ears of our loved ones, people we share deep affection and close relationship with. The Lord came to his own, with a gentle whisper encouraging him and that made a difference even if just bringing Elijah to the mouth of the cave, He still did not forget that God Is Yahweh, for in reverence he covered his face with his cloak.

In spite of the whisper, Elijah was not fully encouraged because of fear, He went and stood at the mouth of the cave. And again, the Lord repeated *“What are you doing here, Elijah?”*

Elijah still filled with fear repeated his very first answer *“I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.”* Lord I have tried my best honestly can you not see it?

When we are down, it is difficult to come out of our cave of fear, depression, discouragement and confusion, the enemy comes gloating and telling us it is

finished but God never leaves us, he is with us all through. The Lord knew why he is there so; -

¹⁵ The LORD said to him, “Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus. When you get there, anoint Hazael king over Aram. ¹⁶ Also, anoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet. ¹⁷ Jehu will put to death any who escape the sword of Hazael, and Elisha will put to death any who escape the sword of Jehu.”

Now the last Verse in our reading says, “Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and all whose mouth have not kissed him”.

God has a beautiful sense of humour.

This is God’s response to Elijah’s panic statement, twice he mentioned that he is the only one left serving and worshiping God that have not bowed to Baal. God responded at the end of the conversation with oh by the way to your earlier statement, I AM YAHWEY, I hold the key to life and death. Man lives to worship me.

God identified himself without saying to Elijah “oh have you forgotten my Name and have you forgotten your own name Elijah”.

This verse has been an encouragement to me through my walk with God, serving him through the ministry for Young families. Do not be afraid, discouraged, or disillusioned Adaeze, the Lord reserves for himself those who will serve and follow him.

The Lord always equips us when he sends us, he does not send us without support, physical, spiritual, and emotional, He does not promise it will be easy, but He promises to be with us always. When Christ sent his disciples out to spread the good news of the Gospel Mark 6:6-7, he sent them in twos for support, encouragement, and empowerment.

In this time of loneliness, depression, diseases, and fear of uncertainty the Lord is sending us to face the world, spread the gospel and be our brother’s keeper. Will we be encouraged to come out of the cave when he asks “*What are you doing here Body of Christ in Cadder?*”

Let us pray. Yahweh, I AM THAT I AM, we thank you for your word and we pray that in your still small voice you whisper words of encouragement to us, remind us of who we are and who you are in our lives. We are called by your name; we are Your Body. May we come out of the cave when you call through Christ our Lord, Amen.