

Note: this presented beautiful LinMar Galena on a morning with keep the heat and and with a gentle

**Grace Episcopal Church Galena, Illinois
June 23, 2013 "Mass in the Grass"
Sermon by Rev. Dr. Gloria G. Hopewell
I Kings 19: 1-15a- Proper 7C**

sermon was outdoors at the Gardens in lovely summer enough shade to humidity at bay breeze that kept

us from being overwhelmed by tiny winged creatures. Still, there wear challenges--roaring motorcycles, THREE trains, and the need to use the very best projected voices possible! So, the text that follows may not be an exact rendering of what was delivered.

How many of you have ever danced the tango? (A number of hands are raised.)

What do we know about the tango? "It is hard." "It takes two."

I want you to picture this for a moment: nearly 50 people, mostly Episcopal priests and diocesan staff, are gathered at a 3-day leadership conference at Northwestern's Kellogg School of Management, specifically the Center for Non-profit Management. Most of our time is spent in a theater-style classroom or in break-out rooms for small group exercises

But at this point, we are in a large room with no tables or chairs--just a vast space, where in pairs we take turns as leaders and followers, walking each other around the room.

Hold that picture in your mind. We will come back to it in a few minutes. But for now, we need to talk about Elijah.

All this month, our Hebrew Scripture readings have been stories of Elijah and his times. We've not really talked about it, because the sermons have come mostly from the Gospel lesson. So, a thumbnail:

- Elijah is one of most revered figures in Jewish tradition, along with Moses; we recall that it was Elijah and Moses who the disciples saw with Jesus on the Mount of the Transfiguration;
- He was expected to return to announce Messiah, so both John the Baptist and Jesus are identified with him;
- He was an early prophet, known by his heroic and miraculous acts rather than by any writings. He lived after the glory days of King David's United Kingdom, and like other ancient prophets, he did not foretell the future so much as he named what was and warned of the consequences of breaking the covenant with God. After the reign of David's son, Solomon, the kingdom split. A series of kings followed. A few were good, but most were not. The single criterion for good was faithfulness to Yahweh, not what they did;

At the time of these stories, Ahab is king. He is basically faithful to Yahweh, but he made a political marriage to Jezebel, a Phoenician and a pagan who worships Ba'al.

And Ahab has allowed the building of a temple to Ba'al. And Jezebel has slain the prophets of Yahweh.

Three weeks ago, we heard how Elijah gathered the people (the prophets of Ba'al and the people of Israel who had drifted away from Yahweh) at the mountain for a test of fire. The true God will light the fire. Those of us who have sung the oratorios of Mendelssohn will remember the dramatic invocations and the mighty victory of Yahweh that caused the people to fall on their faces in praise.

We also heard the stories of Elijah and the widow: the miracle of the oil and grain that did not run out so that the widow and her son were fed throughout the drought; the restoring of the widow's son to life.

So, at his point in the story, Elijah has done very well having had significant successes. Nevertheless, there are problems:

- he knows people are fickle and will stray again at the next temptation or spectacle;
- AND Jezebel is out to get him.

Now, Elijah has run away into the wilderness where he sits and sulks under a broom tree. He is done. Depleted. Despondent. He feels all alone under the broom tree and slides into despair hoping for his life to end. Now. That doesn't work, though. For twice an angel wakes him bringing food. Food that sustains him for a long, long journey--40 days and 40 nights to Mount Horeb.

Mt. Horeb. AKA Mt. Sinai where Moses encountered God. And so does Elijah--not in the fury of the wind. Not in the earthquake or the fire but in the sheer silence. Or as the KJV says, in "the still small voice."

There are many lessons in Elijah's story that have application to our lives. We could talk about the ministering angels that tend us when we are at the point of giving up. Or the challenges of faithfulness when all seems dark.

But today, I want to go another direction--I want to go back to the dance, the tango. Do you have that picture in your head. The 25 pairs leading each other around the room, chattering, laughing. Wondering, "what on earth is this all about? Why is this Princeton Ph.D. Professor of Management and Organizations giving us a basic lesson in tango?"

The next part of exercise was the same, except there was to be no talking! We were to lead each other around the room in silence--no words. Round and round we Went. Forward. Backward. A few collisions.

Then, yet another new challenge: we faced each other, but not in a dance position--just a practice pose. [Demonstrate with partner.] Leader with arms up. Follower with hands firmly pressed on the leaders shoulders. Both lean in. And with no verbal commands we start to move.

And lo, we begin to get it. Without words, we fall into a rhythm, leader and follower, fully engaged, moving in the same directions--at the same time.

I believe that God and Elijah were dancing a tango. Oh, Elijah stumbled a few times, got his feet stepped on, but quickly returned to the dance.

And we can dance with God, too. What does it take to tango? Those of you who practice Centering Prayer probably know this already:

- Trust
- Focus--no distractions but full awareness of partner
- Openness to the next move--even anticipation will get you off track, will shift your balance
- Setting self aside--if worried about how you look, you will surely stumble
- Intimacy and vulnerability--this uses all of you, mind and body
- Intention--most of the time, it doesn't just happen

We did not learn any fancy tango steps last week. Just the basic walking. And, if we chose to actually take lessons, we would walk for a very long time before actually dancing. It takes practice to lead--it takes practice to follow. It takes practice to learn to hear that still, small voice. And intention. The willingness to put yourself--your whole self--in what may be an uncomfortable, even frightening place. In the silence. For most of the time, it is not in the noise and distraction of life that we hear it. It is in the sound of sheer silence.

Amen.