

Was there ever a prophet more faithful and fearless than Elijah? His life as God's servant is exceptional. Is it any wonder that we see him standing with Moses, next to Jesus, on the Mount of Transfiguration? Just before our text, Elijah stands on another mountain, Mt. Carmel. He stands against 450 prophets of Baal. Their sacrifice is untouched and rejected. But Elijah's sacrifice is consumed by fire from heaven. This is an awesome demonstration that the Lord, He alone is God. In faith, and without fear, Elijah then seizes the prophets of Baal and kills them all with the sword.

Is this man even human like us? He appears to be more like a god, the stuff legends are made of. But then we come to our text, and we see, not a god, but a man. And, we can even say, a man who no more resembles a prophet than we do. A man we would be ashamed to associate with. A weak man, a fearful man, a man who runs away and hides. And from whom? Not the king, but from his wife. Jezebel makes an oath to kill Elijah, and this mighty prophet turns his tail and flees for his life like a scared rabbit.

And I, for one, am refreshed and greatly comforted by this. By Elijah's weakness and fear? Yes, and you should be too.

You and I cannot relate to Elijah as a prophet mighty in word and deed. He is above us, not even close to being like one of us. All we can do is to look up to him. Compared to Elijah, who are we? Small, insignificant, unexceptional. Compared to Elijah's faith and fearlessness, I am little to nothing. Not one that God should notice. In fact, the only things God should notice about me are my disobedience and unfaithfulness, my weakness and my fearfulness.

But then we see Elijah running away from Jezebel. He hides himself in the desert. He collapses under a broom tree. And this once mighty prophet is ashamed of himself. So ashamed that he would rather die than live. "*O Lord,*" he says, "*take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers.*" After fleeing, after failing to trust in God, he isn't even able to live with himself. "*It is enough, O Lord, take away my life.*"

How many times have you, and have I, felt like running away from the Jezebels in our life? And how many times have we followed through on our fears? We run off into our own deserts that we make for ourselves. We collapse under our broom trees. And we feel ashamed. Ashamed for giving in to temptation...again. Ashamed for acting on our fears. Ashamed for not trusting in the Lord. There are Christians, maybe some of us here, who are so ashamed of themselves that they would rather die than live.

But God has something to say about this, about our shame, our faithlessness, our fearfulness. Look at Elijah, this once mighty prophet who has become an emotional and spiritual wreck. God sends His angel to him. He gently touches him and he gives him food to eat and water to drink. Does God rebuke Elijah? No. Does He tell him to act like a man? No. He meets Elijah where he is. And this, my friend, is where God meets you: where you are and how you are.

Back on Mt. Carmel, God met Elijah as an awesome God; powerful, a consuming fire. But under the broom tree, Elijah needed God's gentle touch. And this is the God who meets you here this morning. This is not Mt. Carmel. This is the broom tree, for here you can rest, collapse if you need to, and be refreshed with the gentle word of peace in your ears, and the sustaining food and drink God puts in your mouth.

Broom trees would grow to about ten or twelve feet tall. And our text tells us that this broom tree, under which we see Elijah, is a solitary tree. Is not this a picture of the cross on Calvary upon which Jesus was raised ten or twelve feet up? A solitary tree. The only tree that God has set before us. The one tree that matters to us.

When we are out in our deserts, fleeing, failing, emotional and spiritual wrecks, God leads us to rest under the shade of the broom tree. For here the cross of your Lord Jesus is proclaimed. Here you do not have to run anymore. You do not need to be afraid anymore. Here under the broom tree, there is rest for your body and your soul.

Here Jesus gently touches you. "It's okay," He tells you, "I died for you on My tree. I shed My blood for you. I forgive you. Your failing to trust in Me is forgiven. Your giving in to temptation is forgiven. Your weakness and cowardice, I do not reject you for these. I come to you where you are and how you are, and I have for you only forgiveness. Here under My broom tree, you can rest and be at peace."

And then He says this: "*Arise and eat, for the journey is too great for you.*" "Arise and come to My table prepared for you. Here is the food and drink of My body and blood. Fear no more. Fail no more. Give in to temptation no more. In the strength of My food, you will carry on in your journey."

Elijah did carry on. And so will you. Not because you are so strong and fearless. Not because there is no weakness or faithlessness in you. You will carry on, like Elijah, because here, each and every week, you rest and become refreshed under the broom tree. You will journey, therefore, as one who is forgiven and nourished by your Lord. Amen.